

**Mali: Security Forces 'Disappear' 20, Torture Others**  
**By: Human Rights Watch**  
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(Nairobi) – Soldiers loyal to Mali's coup leader have forcibly disappeared at least 20 soldiers allegedly linked to an April 30, 2012 counter-coup, and committed torture and other abuses against dozens of others, Human Rights Watch said today. The security forces of Capt. Amadou Sanogo, who led the March 22 coup against President Amadou Toumani Touré, have also engaged in a campaign of intimidation against journalists, family members of detained soldiers, and others deemed a threat.

Human Rights Watch called on the interim Malian government to investigate the disappearances and other abuses, hold those responsible to account, and take urgent measures to exert control over the security forces. The 20 soldiers whose forcible disappearances were documented by Human Rights Watch are feared dead.

"Malian authorities have a duty to the victims of torture and the families of the disappeared to ensure these crimes are investigated and those responsible brought to book," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Even at this chaotic and difficult time in Mali, authorities should ensure that the horrific treatment and other violations should be promptly addressed."

Human Rights Watch interviewed about 30 people with detailed knowledge of the abuses, including eight people who witnessed torture and enforced disappearances and 13 family members of the detained and disappeared.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the abuses were committed by members of the security services, including soldiers, policemen, and national guardsmen who have supported Sanogo since the March 22 coup. Two described seeing Sanogo at the military base in Kati, 15 kilometers north of Mali's capital, Bamako, when torture and other ill-treatment took place. One witness said he saw Sanogo kick one detainee who has since disappeared, and heard him threaten several others.

Nearly all the witnesses to the abuse who spoke to Human Rights Watch identified officers responsible for the detention facility at the base and believed they reported directly to Sanogo. Torture was also reported at a police camp known as the Mobile Security Group (Groupement Mobile de Sécurité, orGMS).

The mother of one disappeared soldier said that her son had gotten access to a phone and called her on the afternoon of May 1. She said, "My boy sounded so frightened. ... He said the military were arguing among themselves about whether or not to kill my son and the others being held with him. ... He was very afraid."

Most of the disappeared and victims of torture formed part of an elite unit of paratroopers known as the Red Berets, who were detained after being accused of involvement in the April 30 counter-coup. During the counter-coup, the Red Berets attacked the state radio and television building and airport in Bamako, and the Kati military camp. After soldiers loyal to Sanogo put down the counter-coup, they rounded up dozens of people they believed had supported it.

Sanogo and other military officers ousted Touré in March in protest of his handling of a separatist rebellion by ethnic Tuareg in northern Mali. Following international pressure, notably from the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), Sanogo in April agreed to hand over power to a transitional government that would organize elections and return the country to democratic rule. However, with the backing of security forces loyal to him, he has continued to exert considerable influence, meddle in political affairs, and marginalize members of the military who did not support the coup.

Last week, the government of Mali, as a state party to the International Criminal Court (ICC), referred “the situation in Mali since January 2012” to the ICC prosecutor for investigation. The prosecutor’s office will determine at a future date whether it can take jurisdiction of the situation.

“ECOWAS and other governments that have voiced their concern about abuses committed in the context of the armed conflict in the North and the March coup shouldn’t go silent now,” Bekele said. “Mali’s partners should insist the transitional government take concrete and urgent steps to stem any further deterioration in respect for the rule of law.”

Details about enforced disappearances, torture, arbitrary detention, and intimidation of journalists and civil servants follow.

#### Arbitrary Detention

Witnesses and family members of victims said forces loyal to Sanogo immediately began detaining those deemed to be involved in the failed counter-coup on April 30. Over the next several weeks, they detained at least 80 men, most of whom were members of the elite Red Berets parachute regiment.

While people who participated in the counter-coup attempt would be legitimately subject to arrest and prosecution, the actions attributed to Sanogo’s security forces were taken outside of any lawful process. Witnesses said the men were detained at the scene of the attacks, on public transport vehicles, at their homes, as they drove to work, and after being called to the Kati camp or a police station to answer questions about their involvement in the counter-coup. While most are believed to have been taken directly to the Kati camp, at least nine spent several days within the police GMS camp before their transfer to Kati. Many of the detainees endured torture and other ill-treatment in both places.

On June 24, after considerable pressure from detainees’ families and their lawyers, local and international human rights organizations including Amnesty International, and Mali’s justice minister, officers at Kati military camp permitted the transfer of 43 detainees to Gendarme #1, the military police, where their conditions and treatment drastically improved. Malian law provides that soldiers accused of a criminal offense are to be held within the gendarmerie. Since then, many of those who were transferred have been charged for their alleged involvement in the counter-coup.

#### Torture and Ill-Treatment

The most severe and systematic mistreatment targeted rank-and-file soldiers, and took place over several weeks in May. Witnesses at the Kati military camp and GMS described seeing soldiers and policemen drag handcuffed and hogtied detainees along the ground, beat them with batons, sticks, and gun butts, and kick them in the back, head, ribs, genitals, and elsewhere. Others were stabbed in their extremities. Some detainees lost consciousness as a result of the beatings. Wives of some detainees said their husbands had told them they had urinated and, in one case, defecated blood as a result of the torture. Other witnesses and family members said men had suffered broken ribs and, in one case, a fractured arm.

Witnesses within Kati military base said they saw soldiers burn detainees with cigarettes and lighters on their backs, hands, arms, and ears. Two witnesses described how four men were forced at gunpoint and under threat of death to engage in anal sex with one another and said that fabric was stuffed in their mouths before the abuse to stifle their screams. Other detainees were suffocated during interrogation when soldiers stuffed rags into their mouths, pushed the rags back with a wood stick, and tied the men’s mouths with a piece of fabric. Detainees were chained and handcuffed for days on end; relatives able to see them weeks later described seeing scars on their wrists and ankles.

Witnesses said the detainees were kept in small, unventilated rooms with no windows. About 40 men were said to be held in a room that was five meters by five meters. May is one of Mali’s hottest months, and many detainees were not given anything to eat or drink for at least 72 hours, causing severe dehydration. Many drank their own urine to survive.

The wife of a Red Beret told Human Rights Watch: "My husband really suffered.... He told me they made several of them strip and then they kicked them in their genitals; they called female soldiers to their windows to look at the scene. He and others I saw had cigarette burns on their forearms; he told me that during the interrogation, instead of throwing the butt on the ground, they'd put it out in his skin. He had deep scars on his wrists and ankles because of the way he'd been bound. It was only when they got to the gendarmerie that they found some peace."

The detainees were also routinely subjected to psychological abuse. Some were threatened with death each day. One witness said that soldiers showed the detainees a photo of one of the alleged coup plotters who had been killed in detention days earlier. Another said that soldiers routinely told the detainees that two or three of them would be taken out and executed. The police subjected one group of detainees to a mock execution at the GMS camp.

#### Enforced Disappearances

Human Rights Watch interviewed several witnesses who described seeing at least 20 men who had been detained at the Kati military camp and are now feared to have been forcibly disappeared.

Witnesses at Kati camp said that on May 3 between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m., soldiers removed the detainees and put them inside a military truck. According to one eyewitness within Kati that night, "They took them out, bound their hands and legs, and covered their eyes; they have never been heard from or seen since." Another witness gave Human Rights Watch a hand-written list of 21 detainees whom a witness saw being taken from the camp.

There are unconfirmed reports that the men were executed and buried in the town of Diago, some 12 kilometers from Kati. Human Rights Watch spoke with Diago residents who said rounds of shots were fired that night; the residents, however, said they were too terrified to provide further details.

Under international law, an enforced disappearance occurs when the state or state agents take a person into custody but refuse to acknowledge doing so or do not provide information about the person's whereabouts or fate. Among the rights an enforced disappearance may violate are those to life, liberty, and security of the person, including protection from torture and other ill-treatment.

Ten witnesses described seeing one or several of the disappeared men inside Kati camp or the GMS in the 48 hours before they "disappeared." One was seen handcuffed to a military truck within the GMS at around 5 a.m. on May 1. Another witness saw a private second class – who is on the list of those disappeared – within a courtyard at Kati between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. on May 1. He said one of the soldier's eyes was "bleeding from the beating he received, like there was a hole where his eye had been."

Human Rights Watch learned that between 10 a.m. and noon on May 1, some two dozen soldiers removed 19 wounded soldiers, including Red Berets and loyalists to Sanogo, from the Gabriel Touré Public Hospital in Bamako and took them in at least two military trucks to Kati military camp. Witnesses heard the military officer in charge of the evacuation say the patients were being taken to the military hospital at Kati. A 20th soldier gravely wounded in the abdomen was allowed to stay at Gabriel Touré. Human Rights Watch received unconfirmed reports that, upon arrival at Kati military camp, the soldiers loyal to Sanogo were transferred to the Kati military hospital, while the Red Berets were refused treatment and detained. Their whereabouts remain unknown.

Family members of the men who had been disappeared told Human Rights Watch that they had searched for their loved ones in hospitals, gendarme and police stations, the local prison, and several military camps. At least two of the men who have been disappeared appeared on state-run television station on May 1; they were presented by the television interviewer as detainees associated with the counter coup.

One family member told Human Rights Watch, “When we saw him on television I leapt, screaming, ‘That is my son! My son is alive!’ Since then we have searched for him everywhere, but there is no trace. Tell me, how can he be there on national television one day and simply disappear the next?”

The mother of another said, “I call my son’s phone, but he doesn’t answer. I’ve been everywhere and looked at all the lists – the list of those wounded, the list of the dead, the list of those in detention, but my son’s name is not there. But still, I have faith that I will see his face again. Faith is all I have.”

Family members of Red Beret soldiers living within the Djikoroni Red Beret camp complained of harassment, sexual threats, and intimidation by soldiers loyal to Captain Sanogo who now guard the camp. The wife of one Red Beret still detained for alleged links to the coup said, “When we come and go from the camp they say things like, ‘We’ve chased your husbands. We can have sex with you any time we want’ and to the daughters they say things like, ‘Your family is nothing....We are the ones now in charge.’”

#### Intimidation of Journalists and Civil Servants

Members of state security forces have tried to suppress the publication of information regarding abuses in the aftermath of the failed counter-coup. They have called in for questioning or visited the offices of at least five journalists and two civil servants who were investigating the coup, the treatment of detainees, enforced disappearances, or the existence of a mass grave. While the journalists and civil servants did not suffer any physical aggression during the questioning, they reported being pressured to reveal their sources, drop their investigations, and desist from publishing or speaking about the events. Several believed their phone conversations were routinely intercepted by the state security forces. The intimidation of journalists appears to form part of a wider crackdown on Malian journalism, which began after the March 22 coup and has since intensified.

In July, two journalists were abducted by armed, masked gunmen driving pickup trucks with no license plates, severely beaten, and dumped on the outskirts of Bamako after being warned to stop criticizing the military. On July 2, Abdoulaye Keita, editor of the *Aurore* newspaper, was pulled into a 4x4 car by armed men in civilian dress, taken to an isolated area near the airport, and beaten by men who repeatedly castigated Malian journalists. On July 13, a respected Malian journalist and publisher of *L’Independent*, Saouti Labass Haidara, was abducted by eight heavily armed men in civilian dress.

From his hospital bed, he told Human Rights Watch, “They fired in the air as they stuffed me into their car.... After seeing the lights of the capital start to dim, they pulled over, threw me on the ground, and kicked and beat me further. They kept referring to the one in charge as ‘captain,’ and said, repeatedly, ‘It is you journalists who are irritating us.’ They threatened to kill me if I brought a legal case against them, and said at any rate, nothing would happen to them.”

Haidara suffered a fractured arm and multiple contusions. The justice minister has promised an investigation into the incident.

One journalist told Human Rights Watch, “Mr. Haidara is one of Mali’s most revered journalists and is like the doyen of the Malian press. He has mentored 10 editors of smaller papers. By attacking Mr. Haidara, they intend to send a message to all of us.”