

## ICC starts probe into Mali crisis

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Mali rebels are accused of executions, rapes and the use of child soldiers

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has launched a preliminary inquiry into alleged atrocities committed in rebel-held northern Mali.

ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said the move followed a request by the Malian government.

Armed groups – including Islamist rebels – are accused of executions, rapes and the use of child soldiers.

The rebels took control of northern Mali after an army coup in March in the impoverished West African country.

'War crime'

"I have instructed my office to immediately proceed with a preliminary examination of the situation," Ms Bensouda said in a statement on Wednesday.

She said that the Malian government had admitted that it was "unable to prosecute or try the perpetrators".

The inquiry would seek to establish there are grounds to bring charges for the alleged atrocities.

Ms Bensouda earlier said that she regarded the destruction of Muslim shrines in the ancient city of Timbuktu as "a war crime".

The army seized power in Mali in March, accusing the elected government of not doing enough to halt the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and the Islamist groups.

But the rebels then took advantage of the army's disarray to seize the whole of the north – an area the size of France.

Among the insurgents are Tuareg and groups linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the north-African wing of al-Qaeda.

Mali was once considered one of the most stable countries in the region.

In a separate development, a think-tank warned in its report that any military intervention in Mali could sink the country further into chaos.

The International Crisis Group, also urged Mali's warring parties – as well as the world community – to try to find a political solution to the crisis.

Last week, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said he was not ruling out a military option in Mali.