

Mali says separatists break peace deal after ethnic clashes

By Reuters

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(Reuters) - Mali's government accused northern Tuareg separatists on Saturday of violating a ceasefire deal signed last month after 4 people were killed in ethnic violence in the northern town of Kidal, a week ahead of elections.

The violence raised fears about disruptions to the July 28 presidential election, pushed for by [France](#) and Western donors and meant to draw a line under a March 2012 coup that led to a 10-month seizure of northern Mali by al Qaeda-linked rebels.

Shops were looted and vehicles burned in two days of clashes between pro-separatist Tuareg youths and black Africans in the desert town. Malian troops and U.N. peacekeepers deployed on Friday to restore calm.

"Armed men attacked the population favorable to Mali in the town of Kidal, killing four people," said a government communiqué, calling the events a violation of the truce agreed signed in Ouagadougou, the capital of neighboring Burkina Faso.

The MNLA separatist group has said none of its fighters were involved in the clashes and that it has honored the Ouagadougou agreement

Malian authorities appealed to major powers to ensure respect for the agreement and efforts to organize the end-month vote. [France](#), the former colonial power in Mali, has troops stationed in Kidal.

The June ceasefire deal between Mali and the MNLA allowed government soldiers and officials to return to Kidal. The remote northern town, a traditional separatist stronghold, had been recaptured by the MNLA in February when a French military campaign drove out the Islamists.

Under the terms of the deal, MNLA fighters were supposed to remain off the streets.

Paris, which sent 4,000 soldiers to crush the Islamist enclave in northern Mali, wants the election to go ahead on time as it seeks to wind down its military presence and hand over to a 12,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping mission still being deployed.

Civic advocacy groups and some local politicians have warned that, with government administration in northern Mali in tatters, the country is not yet ready to hold an election.

The interim government is aiming to distribute voting cards to some 80 percent of the 6.8 million registered voters in Mali in time for the election.

It said on Friday that it had so far given cards to 60 percent of voters, lower than the 68 percent announced earlier in the week by an interior ministry official.

(Reporting by Tiemoko Diallo and Adama Diarra; Writing by Daniel Flynn; Editing by Mark Heinrich)

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