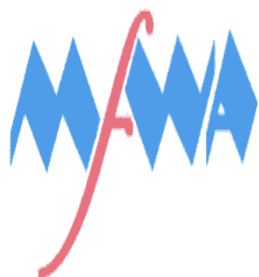




Mali: Steady improvement but rights violations persist

- Monitoring Report

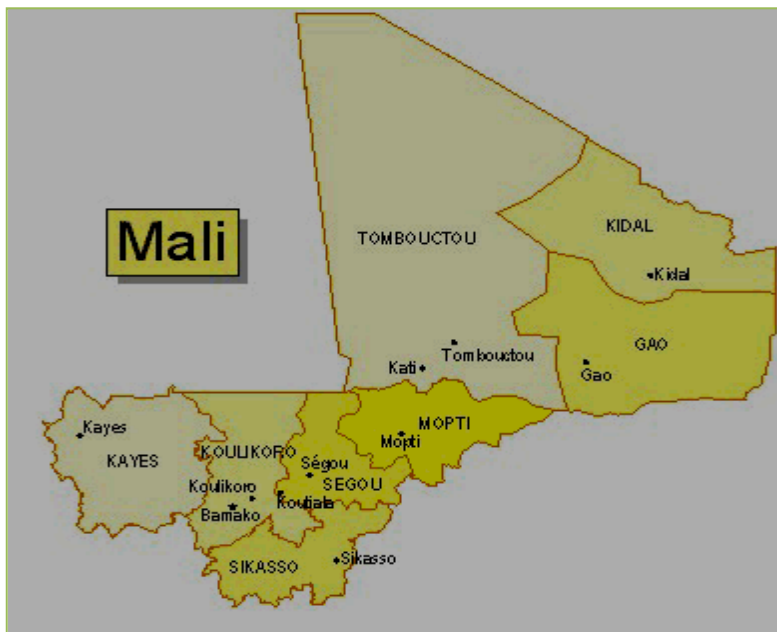


September-November, 2013

I. Introduction:

Mali is gradually rebuilding its relatively strong pre-conflict democratic and human rights foundations that were torn apart by close to eighteen months of conflict between rebel groups in the north and government troops. A significant milestone in the country's reconstruction process was the election of Ibrahim Boubacar Keita as President and his assumption of office in September.

This monitoring report highlights key free expression, media development, safety of journalists and general human rights issues in Mali for the period September 1, to November 30, 2013. It is the third in the series of monitoring reports being released by the MFWA. The reports form part of a project implemented jointly by the MFWA, the International Media Support (IMS) and the Panos Institute of West Africa (PIWA). The project is aimed at strengthening the Malian media and promoting free expression in order to rebuild the country's democracy.



This report is segmented into the following:

- General Human Rights/Social Conditions
- Media Development
- Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists

General Human Rights and Social Conditions in Mali

While the election of President Keita and his assumption of office in September has been a major step in Mali's democratization process, a legislative arm of government is yet to be in place. The Keita government with the support of foreign forces has tried to restore peace in the country especially in the troubled north. The arrest of former coup leader Captain Amadou Sanogo in November, was an indication of the Keita's government's determination to establish full civilian control of governance.

Despite these positive developments, incidence of human rights violations persist particularly in the three northern regions. During the period under review (September-November), there were terrorist attacks in Timbuktu. The period also witnessed clashes between the Malian Army and Tuareg separatist groups in Kidal and sporadic shelling in Gao.

For example, two French Journalists from Radio France International were gruesomely murdered in Kidal in November, raising concerns about the very fragile and dangerous security situation in that region. Prior to the murder of the French journalists, a group of soldiers from the Malian army had been attacked in the region.

In September, two civilians were killed and six Malian soldiers wounded in Timbuktu after suicide bomb attacks by rebel groups near a Malian army camp. Again, in November, 2013 a vehicle carrying nomadic traders hit a mine about 100 km off Menaka in Gao resulting in the death of four and injury to eight others.

On the positive side however, the period witnessed the return of large numbers of displaced persons. For example, on October 26, 2013, through the combined effort of Government of Mali and its international partners, 150 people return home to Gao.

Media Development

On the media front, the period under review witnessed massive and vigorous training and sensitization programmes to strengthen the media. Majority of such media training programmes focused on enhancing professional standards and the media's capacity to serve as an important reliable information source in the period of conflict. For example, to promote conflict sensitive journalism, the Association of Journalists for Peace and Non-violence in partnership with UNESCO launched a competition to reward best print and radio reports on Peace building and reconciliation in Mali.

Similarly, the US and German Embassies in Mali, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and DW Akademie organized a seminar for the national print journalists on the role of media in supporting democracy in transitional countries.

It is also a positive development to note that as part of the reconstruction of post conflict Mali, majority of radio stations use their media to do civic education. This indeed strengthens the agenda setting capability and the education and information responsibility of the media in Mali.

Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists

The period witnessed brief shutdowns of radio Zan-zan and radio Soni both in Gao. Radio Zan-zan, a community radio station, was closed down by community leaders who accused the radio station of defaming them. The station was however re-opened after two days following interventions by community members.

Radio Soni in Ansongo on the other hand was closed down by the village council but has since been re-opened.

On a positive note however, the period witnessed the opening of an additional radio station in Gao. The new radio station called *Voice of Women* is located in the city of Bourem, 90 km from the regional capital Gao. Another significant milestone for free expression during the period under review is the release of “*Voice Radio Anefif*, the regional (Kidal) branch of the ORTEM by the rebel MNLA. In November, 2013, the MNLA evacuated from the premises of the national broadcaster in Kidal. This followed some discussions held at a stakeholder’s meeting in Ouagadougou. At the end of this meeting, with pressure from the international community, the Tuareg movement MNLA pledged to release the governorate and local regional broadcasting station (ORTM).

The MFWA finds this development most significant and commends all the actors including government in ensuring that this was possible. The MFWA believes that as the regional branch of the national broadcaster, this will help to restore voice to people in the region of Kidal.

General Challenges

The period under review again witnessed energy/power challenges which continued to affect citizens and the full operation of some media organisations. It is worth pointing

out that this phenomenon has been recurrent throughout the MFWA's monitoring exercise since May, 2013.

Some towns in the northern part of the country (Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu) continue to face electricity and water challenges. Accordingly, although media organisations have resumed broadcasting, production is not consistent since electricity supply is off for the most part of the day.

CONCLUSION:

Despite the gains in free expression, human rights and safety of journalists conditions in Mali, these achievements stand the risk of being derailed so long as the security challenge in the north of the country persist. It is hoped that the Keita government with its development partners will restore, security and human rights in the country.