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“By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists”

Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso



**“By Day We Fear the Army,
By Night the Jihadists”**

Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso

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Map

Burkina Faso Provinces



Summary

Since 2016, armed Islamist groups have dramatically increased their presence in Burkina Faso, creating an environment of fear throughout the country. They have attacked government buildings and schools, intimidated teachers, conducted brutal assaults on cafés and other gathering places, and executed those suspected of collaborating with authorities. In response, Burkinabè security forces have conducted counterterrorism operations in 2017 and 2018 that resulted in numerous allegations of extrajudicial killings, abuse of suspects in custody, and arbitrary arrests.

The violence has largely taken place in the northern Sahel administrative region as well as in the capital, Ouagadougou, forcing over 12,000 northern residents to flee, according to United Nations figures. These residents include local government representatives, civil servants, teachers and nurses.

A patchwork of armed Islamist groups with shifting and overlapping allegiances are involved in and have claimed responsibility for many of the attacks, including Ansaroul Islam, founded in late 2016 by Burkinabè Islamic preacher Malam Ibrahim Dicko; Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates, notably the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM); and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The growing presence of these groups in Burkina Faso is linked to insecurity in neighboring Mali, where northern regions fell to separatist Tuareg and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups in 2012.

In the north, armed Islamist groups have attacked dozens of army, gendarme and army posts. In 2016 and 2017, Ouagadougou suffered two brutal attacks on popular restaurants which resulted in the death of 47 civilians and one member of the security forces. On March 2, 2018, fighters attacked the French Embassy and the national army headquarters in Ouagadougou, resulting in the death of eight security force personnel.

Based on interviews during two research missions in February and March 2018, this report documents abuses in the Sahel administrative region and Ouagadougou by armed Islamist groups, including execution-style killings, and alleged abuses by security forces between 2016 and 2018. Human Rights Watch interviewed 67 victims and witnesses of abuse; officials from the ministries of justice, defense, and education; teachers; health workers;

local government officials; diplomats and staff of humanitarian organizations; security sector analysts; and youth, religious and community leaders.

Human Rights Watch documented the alleged execution-style killings of 19 men by armed Islamist groups. The killings took place in or near 12 different villages in northern Burkina Faso and largely targeted those accused of providing information to the security forces, including village chiefs and local officials. Many of the men were executed in their homes, a few had their throats cut and one was decapitated, according to witnesses who spoke to Human Rights Watch.

Villagers from the Sahel region described being extremely frightened by the presence of armed Islamist fighters who regularly threatened them with reprisals if they provided information on their whereabouts to the state security services. Several residents of different ethnic groups described having been abducted, questioned, and, in some cases, beaten or robbed by the armed men.

Education sector workers described a series of threats, intimidations and attacks against schools and teachers by armed Islamists, primarily in the Sahel region, including the abduction of a teacher and killing of a school director. This has led to the closure of at least 219 primary and secondary schools, leaving some 20,000 students out of school.

Security forces— soldiers and gendarmes, including personnel from two special units created to combat terrorism, and to a lesser extent, members of the police—conducting counterterrorism operations since 2016 have also been implicated in numerous human rights violations.

Human Rights Watch documented the alleged summary execution by state security forces of 14 people. Seven men were allegedly executed on a single day in late December 2017. About a dozen witnesses described seeing bodies along roads and on footpaths near the towns of Djibo, Nassoumbou, and Bourem among others. Almost all of the victims were last seen in the custody of government security forces.

Community leaders complained of numerous instances in which the security forces appeared to randomly detain men *en masse* who happened to be in the vicinity of incursions, attacks or ambushes by armed Islamist groups. Gendarmes released the

majority of detainees after preliminary investigations which often lasted several days, but others have been detained for months.

Human Rights Watch documented six such mass arrests during which numerous men were severely mistreated and four men died, allegedly as a result of severe beatings. Witnesses said the abuse usually stopped when military forces and the police handed the detainees over to government gendarmes. Health workers described treating men for cuts, bruises, hematomas and gashes sustained in detention.

The vast majority of the victims of abuses by both the armed Islamists and the security forces were ethnic Peuhl, whose members largely reside in the north. “The army acts like all Peuhls are jihadists, yet it is the very Peuhl who are victimized by the Jihadists – we have been killed, decapitated, kidnapped and threatened,” said a local mayor.

Those interviewed consistently described being caught between Islamists’ threats to execute those who collaborated with the state, and the security forces, who expected them to provide intelligence about the presence of armed groups and meted out collective punishment, including mistreatment and arbitrary detention, when they didn’t.

Victims of violence by both the armed Islamists and security forces complained about the slow pace, or complete lack, of investigations into human rights cases since 2016. Community leaders from the north complained about what they perceived to be a partial response to abuses by the authorities. They said killings and abuses by armed Islamists almost always triggered an investigation and, often arrests, while alleged abuses by security force personnel were rarely, if ever, investigated by the security forces or the judiciary.

Justice officials said that investigations by the Ouagadougou-based Specialized Judicial Unit Against Crime and Terrorism, established in 2017 to try all terrorism-related cases, were slow as a result of the lack of personnel and the complexity of the cases, which often involve different international jurisdictions, notably from other countries in the Sahel region.

The government of Burkina Faso should urgently open investigations into the incidents of alleged human rights violations documented in this report, take measures to prevent further abuses, and ensure that those involved in all counterterrorism operations abide by international human rights law. The Burkinabè Human Rights Commission should also conduct a credible independent investigation into human rights violations.

Burkina Faso's international partners, notably the European Union, France and the United States, should privately and publicly call upon the government to conduct prompt, credible investigations into allegations of killings and other abuses by the Burkina Faso security forces.

Methodology

This report documents abuses in the Sahel administrative region and Ouagadougou by armed Islamist groups and some members of the security forces between 2016 and 2018. During two research missions in 2018, Human Rights Watch conducted 67 interviews, 38 of which were with victims of and witnesses to abuses. The other 29 interviews were with justice, education and defense ministry officials; teachers, health workers and members of local government; diplomats, civil society activists and humanitarian workers; security analysts; and religious and community leaders.

Interviews took place in February and March 2018 in Burkina Faso; research by telephone was conducted in March, April and May 2018. The 38 victims and witnesses interviewed are residents of 17 towns and villages in northern Burkina Faso and Ouagadougou. Interviewees were identified with the assistance of several civil society organizations and numerous individuals. Interviews were conducted in French, Mossi, spoken in Ouagadougou and elsewhere, and Fulfulde, spoken by members of the Peuhl ethnic group. Interviews in Mossi and Fulfulde were conducted with the assistance of interpreters.

For security reasons, all interviews were conducted in or around Ouagadougou. Most victims and witnesses to incidents in northern Burkina Faso travelled to Ouagadougou for the interviews while a few, who had recently fled violence in the north, already lived there.

Many of the victims and witnesses interviewed could not remember the exact date of the incidents they described. The researcher sought to determine the approximate date by probing various reference points, such as if the abuse had happened before or after major holidays, seasonal events or attacks.

Nearly all victims and witnesses to abuse by both the armed Islamist groups and the security forces expressed extreme anxiety about their identities being revealed. As a result we have, in several cases, withheld details, including the location and precise date of some incidents, which might enable the identification of those who spoke with us.

The researcher informed all interviewees of the nature and purpose of the research, and our intention to publish a report with the information gathered. The researcher obtained oral consent for each interview and gave each interviewee the opportunity to decline to answer questions. All interviewees provided verbal informed consent to participate.

Interviewees did not receive material compensation for speaking with Human Rights Watch, however travel expenses incurred were reimbursed.

Background on Armed Islamist Groups in Burkina Faso

Attacks by Islamist armed groups in Burkina Faso have been rising steadily since early 2016. In an October 2017 statement to the United Nations Security Council, Burkinabè Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alpha Barry, said Burkina Faso had since early 2016 suffered 80 attacks by armed Islamist groups, which have left 133 dead.¹

The groups' areas of operation are concentrated in the administrative provinces of Soum and Oudalan in the northern Sahel Region bordering Mali and Niger, and in Ouagadougou, the capital city. From late 2017, attacks have spread into other administrative regions notably the Est, Boucle du Mouhoun and Nord Regions.

A patchwork of groups with shifting and overlapping allegiances are involved in and have claimed responsibility for many of the attacks including Ansaroul Islam, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its affiliates notably the Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), and, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS).

The growing presence of these groups in Burkina Faso is linked to insecurity in neighboring Mali, where northern regions fell to separatist Tuareg and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups in 2012. A 2013 French-led military intervention and 2015 peace agreement produced some stability in northern Mali, however from 2015, armed Islamist groups have spread to central Mali, and from 2016, into Burkina Faso.

Ansaroul Islam was founded in late 2016 by Islamic preacher Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a Soum native. Dicko gained popularity by denouncing corruption, inequality and abuses by the state, Peuhl clan leaders, and traditional chiefs.² From around 2009, he began spreading his message in local mosques and radios, primarily in the Sahel region, by way

¹ Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the United Nations, "Déclaration de S.E.M. Alpha Barry, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, la Coopération et des Burkinabè de l'extérieur du Burkina Faso au Briefing du Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies sur la paix et la sécurité en Afrique," New York, October 30, 2017, https://www.un.int/burkinafaso/statements_speeches/d%C3%A9claration-de-sem-alpha-barry-ministre-des-affaires-etrang%C3%A8res-de-la-o (accessed April 23, 2018).

² International Crisis Group, "The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North," <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/254-social-roots-jihadist-violence-burkina-fasos-north> (accessed April 23, 2018).



Combatants from Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist group Ansar Dine sit in a vehicle in Gao in northeastern Mali. The growing presence of armed Islamist groups in Burkina Faso is linked to insecurity in neighboring Mali, where northern regions fell to separatist Tuareg and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups in 2012.

© 2012 Adama Diarra/Reuters

of a local religious association to promote Islam he founded, called Al-Irchad.³ Dicko's popularity and the membership in Al-Irchad steadily grew, but his discourse became progressively more radical and, in 2012, he joined up with armed Islamist groups which had taken over northern Mali. In 2013, he was detained by French forces and imprisoned in Bamako until 2015.⁴ He eventually allied himself with a Malian AQIM affiliate, the Macina Liberation Front, and in 2016, formed Ansaroul Islam.

According to Human Rights Watch interviews with a few current or former members of armed Islamist groups, Ansaroul Islam has received training and logistical support from

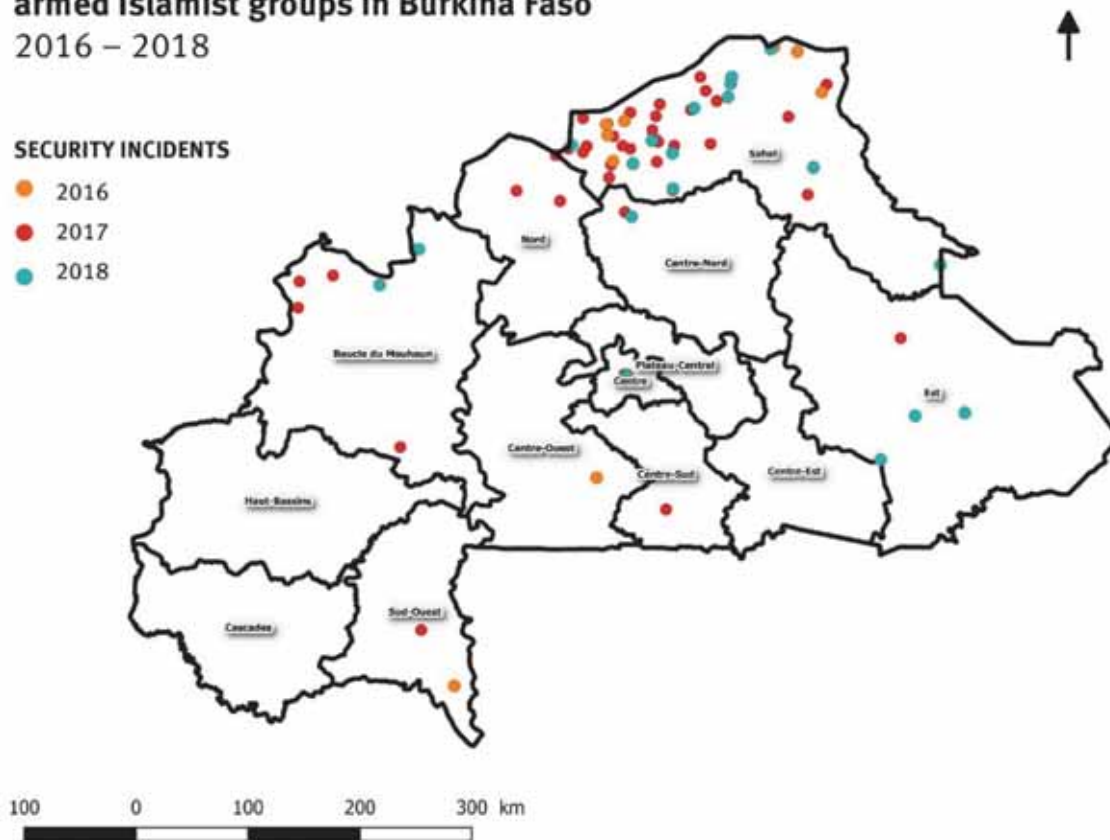
³ "Comment est né Ansaroul Islam, premier groupe djihadiste de l'Histoire du Burkina Faso," *Le Monde*, April 11, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/11/comment-est-ne-ansaroul-islam-premier-groupe-djihadiste-de-l-histoire-du-burkina-faso_5109520_3212.html (accessed May 2, 2018).

⁴ "Islamist Insurgency in Burkina Faso: A Profile of Malam Ibrahim Dicko," *Aberfoyle International Security*, April 30, 2017, <http://www.aberfoylesecurity.com/?p=3908> (accessed April 23, 2018).

Major security incidents involving armed Islamist groups in Burkina Faso 2016 – 2018

SECURITY INCIDENTS

- 2016
- 2017
- 2018



both AQIM and ISGS. It largely launches its attacks from bases in central Mali. In April 2017, an attack by French forces destroyed Ansaroul’s largest base in the Foulsaré forest, in Mali. A survivor of the attack told Human Rights Watch that some 20 Ansaroul members were killed, or died shortly after the attack from their wounds, illness or from dehydration, including Malam Dicko. Malam’s brother Jafar then took over leadership of the organization.

AQIM and its affiliates, especially JNIM have claimed responsibility for numerous attacks in Burkina.⁵ These include the April 2015 kidnapping of Romanian mine worker Iulian Ghergut, the January 2016 attack on a Ouagadougou restaurant and hotel, the January

⁵ “Analysis: Jihadist attacks on the rise in northern Burkina Faso,” *Long War Journal*, October 2, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/10/analysis-jihadist-attacks-on-the-rise-in-northern-burkina-faso.php> (accessed April 13, 2018).

2016 kidnapping of Australian doctor Ken Elliot, and the March 2, 2018 attack in Ouagadougou on the army headquarters and French Embassy.⁶

Armed Islamist groups active in the Sahel have since 2012 concentrated their recruitment efforts on the ethnic Peuhl. In 2012, Human Rights Watch documented a cross border recruitment operation bringing Peuhl men and boys from both Niger and Burkina Faso into Gao, Mali for training by AQIM affiliate the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO.) Since then, significant numbers of Peuhl men have been recruited into armed Islamist groups in central Mali and northern Burkina.

Since 2015, numerous Peuhl community leaders from the Sahel countries have told Human Rights Watch they are concerned about the Islamists exploitation of community frustration with poverty, government corruption, generational disputes within Peuhl clan leadership, the lack of justice for common crime, and abusive conduct by the security forces to garner recruits. They also expressed concern about what they perceive to be a demonization of the Peuhl community, who, they say, are blamed for the rising insecurity in the Sahel, and about collective punishment meted out against them by the security forces.⁷

At time of writing, the violence and insecurity in Burkina Faso had led to the internal displacement of over 12,000 residents,⁸ 5,000 of whom fled as a consequence of violence in late 2017.⁹ Another 2,000 Burkinabè have sought refuge in neighboring Mali.¹⁰

The spread of militant attacks throughout the Sahel has sparked diplomatic and military engagement by the international community, and, in 2017, led to the creation of a five-

⁶ "Al Qaeda branch in Mali claims Burkina Faso attacks," *Threat Matrix, Long War Journal*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/03/al-qaeda-branch-in-mali-reportedly-claims-burkina-faso-attacks.php> (accessed April 13, 2018).

⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl elders and community, religious, and political leaders, Bamako, Severe, and Ouagadougou, 2015-2018.

⁸ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Humanitarian Response, "Plan d'Urgence et de Résilience," April 2018, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/bfa-hwp-20180409-lowres.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2018), p. 17.

⁹ "Burkina: 5000 déplacés dans le Nord (CICR)," *Africatime*, March 27, 2018, <http://fr.africatime.com/gambie/articles/burkina-5000-deplaces-dans-le-nord-cicr> (accessed May 3, 2018).

¹⁰ UNHCR, "Operational Update, Burkina Faso December 2017-February 2018," <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Operational%20Update%20Burkina%20Faso%20-%20December%202017%20-%20February%202018.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2018).

nation counterterrorism military force, the G5 Sahel Joint Force. The force will include troops from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad, and will coordinate their operations with 4,000 French troops serving with Operation Barkhane, and with 12,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops already in Mali.

Killings and Intimidation by Islamist Armed Groups in Northern Burkina Faso

We fear these people (armed Islamists) ...they have threatened, killed, and kidnapped us. Our schools are closed, there is no food, and the economy is dying. If I could take my whole village and leave this place I would.

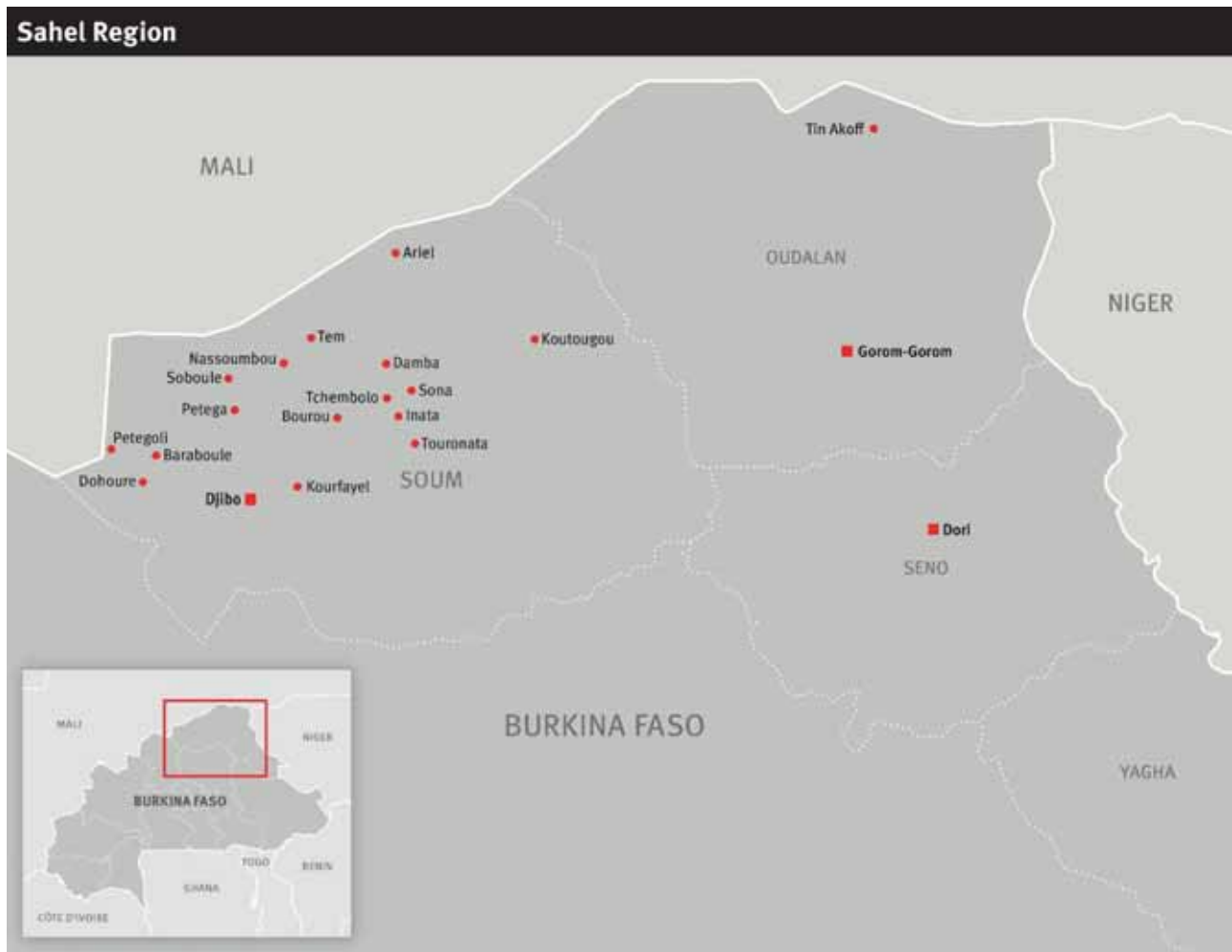
— Village elder from the Sahel region, February 2018.

Numerous villagers from the Sahel region described being frightened by the presence of armed Islamist fighters who had, since 2016, periodically passed through their areas. Many residents said the armed fighters warned them not to provide information on their whereabouts to the state security services; others said they felt pressured to collaborate, including by selling them petrol and provisions. Several residents of different ethnic groups said they have been abducted, questioned and in some cases beaten or robbed by the armed men.

Human Rights Watch documented 19 alleged execution-style killings by Islamist armed groups which occurred between November 2016 and April 2018. Most of the victims were ethnic Peuhl and had been killed within or around the villages or towns of Djibo, Nassoumbou, Tem, Sona, Dohouré, Koutougou, Kenou, Kourfayel, Soboulé, Yorsala and Pétéga, all within the Soum Province. Armed Islamists are suspected in the killing of a teacher in Kain, in the Nord Region.

Those targeted included village counselors, mayors, village elders, marabouts, retired security force members, and teachers. Most had been killed in their homes or villages; a few had been held in bush camps in Burkina Faso or Mali for several days before being killed.

Witnesses described a similar method used by the alleged armed Islamists involved in the abductions and killings in which several men armed with semi-automatic weapons, notably AK-47's, on motorcycles would ride into a town or village to abduct or directly shoot at the victim, who appeared to have been directly targeted. After the abduction or assault, they would quickly leave.



Armed Islamist groups rarely claim responsibility for these killings. However, witnesses, security sources and community leaders noted several reasons why they firmly believed the armed Islamists were responsible for the killings: First, because many of the victims were clearly identified as representatives of the state, against whom armed Islamists have waged armed attacks. Second, because witnesses from several of the incidents identified some of the perpetrators involved in the killings as former adherents of Al-Ir Chad and believed them to be current members of Ansaroul Islam. Third, because the armed men rarely stole from the victims, suggesting banditry was not a motive. And fourth, because several of the victims had, according to witnesses, previously received warnings from the armed Islamists.

The witnesses believed many of the men were executed for their alleged collaboration with the security forces; some victims were allegedly executed after information provided had



A Peuhl herder shepherds his cows in the Soum province of Burkina Faso. The vast majority of the victims of abuses by both the armed Islamists and the security forces are ethnic Peuhl, whose communities are largely located in the north of Burkina Faso. © 2018 Kisal

led to the arrest or death of a suspect by the security forces. A few former Al-Irchad members were allegedly killed for refusing to support the group's evolution into Ansaroul Islam. Some of those killed represented the social classes and clans Al-Irchad had long-denounced, while a few others were reportedly killed by the armed Islamists to settle personal scores. Banditry, notably cattle theft, accompanied some of these incidents.

On or around February 26, 2018, the bodies of Harouna Hassan Dicko and Housseni Ousmanne Dicko, both around 50 years-old, were found a few kilometers from their home in Djibo with deep gashes in their throats. A neighbor noted: "The Jihadists took them away and several days later we found their bodies. The jihadists have really targeted this family, maybe because they're active in local government and support the security forces." This witness, who described being very close to the family, said the men had "been threatened by Ansaroul several times for having helped the authorities."¹¹ Witnesses provided Human Rights Watch with photographs of the victims.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

On April 17, 2018, *Agence France Presse* reported that a spokesperson for the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) had taken responsibility for the April 8, 2018, killing of Hamidou Koundaba, the mayor of the commune of Koutougou (120 kilometers from Djibo), for collaborating with the government.¹² A witness described the attack to Human Rights Watch:

During the 6 p.m. prayer, two men armed with Kalashnikovs, dressed in camouflage, came into the village on a moto, and went directly to the Mayor's compound. One stopped in front, while the other went directly into his house ...they were speaking in Pulaar....it happened quickly. They killed him then fled. He'd been shot three times – on the left shoulder, then twice in the chest. Everyone in Koutougou is shocked by the brutality.¹³

Several villagers described what appeared to be coordinated operations in which from four to a dozen armed Islamists on motorcycles carried out near-simultaneous killings in several villages. An elder described one such operation in mid-September 2017, in which three men who reportedly opposed Ansaroul Islam were killed:

At around 3 a.m., we heard the sound of motorcycles, yelling and then gunfire...the next day we saw the bodies on the road between Dohouré and Oudouga villages. They'd all been shot several times in the chest. The villagers explained that one group of about six Ansaroul had dragged out the village chief of Dohouré-Fulbe, Dicko Amadou Mincalou. At the same time another group took away the marabout and a young man named Tamboura from nearby Dohouré-Rimaïbé. All three were known for refusing to adhere to their agenda...they'd rejected Ansaroul from the very beginning and some days prior, the army arrested four members of a family from Dohouré and sent them to the High Security Prison in Ouagadougou....I think it was related...¹⁴

¹² "Jihadists abduct Burkina teacher 'for speaking French'," *Expatica*, April 17, 2018, https://www.expatica.com/fr/news/country-news/Burkina-attack-kidnapping_1815096.html (accessed May 2, 2018)

¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Koutougou, April 16, 2018.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

About two months later, on November 27, the armed Islamists returned to the same village, Dohouré-Rimaïbé, and killed Aissama Tamboura, the municipal counselor. A villager said: “He was on their list the first time, but had gone to the Mec (Mecca) for pilgrimage. In November, they came around midnight, broke into his house and shot him again and again....we understood he’d told the authorities about the Jihadists presence near our village.”¹⁵

A villager said of another such operation, on November 12, 2016, which targeted two village counselors and a former Al-Irchad leader:

I was at a celebration when I got a call saying, ‘careful, we just saw three motorcycles heading towards you.’ Suddenly two men on a motorcycle who we recognized as being adherents of Malam rocked up and took up position in front of the village counselor from Soboulé who had come to our village to take part. One of the jihadists tried to fire but his gun jammed and the population set upon him and beat him severely. I recognized the gunmen...they used to be in Al-Irchad. Sometime later, I received calls explaining how other groups of jihadists had, around the same time, executed Tamboura Amadou Oumarou, a village counselor in nearby Pétéga, and, in Djibo, Amadou Boli from Al-Irchad. The people they hunted had opposed Malam’s new organization. ¹⁶

According to the same witness, the Soboulé village counselor, Hassan Dicko, who had narrowly escaped assassination in November 2016, was killed by the armed Islamists, on February 4, 2017. “He tried to flee, but they caught up with him a few months later; they got him in a village south of Djibo called Yorsola.” ¹⁷ The local media reported that the attack left both Dicko and his five-year old son dead, while another son was wounded.¹⁸

One terrified witness, who asked Human Rights Watch not to include the name of his village or the date of the incident for fear of reprisal, described how he “was being hunted”

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

¹⁸ “Conseiller de Soboulé tue a Titao: ‘Les assassins etaient deux, a moto, cagoules et en tenue militaire’,” NetAfrique, February 5, 2017, <http://netafrique.net/conseiller-de-Soboulé-tue-a-titao-les-assassins-etaient-deux-a-moto-cagoules-et-en-tenue-militaire-correspondant/> (accessed May 2, 2018).

for his opposition to the Islamists. “I’d just finished praying when I heard the sound of motorcycles which are forbidden at night so I knew it was them. I ran to hide, but saw them – four motos, two on each. Two forced their way into my house - they overturned the beds looking for me, and when they didn’t see me, went to other houses. I heard gunshots and later saw the people they killed, in their homes.... they were known to support the army.”¹⁹

A shepherd described the killing around October 2017 of 57 year-old animal herder, Uyah Dlicko, who lived in a hamlet near Tchembolo:

I was woken up by the commotion. Two of them arrived, forced their way into his house calling his name two times – he said, ‘I’m coming’...he hadn’t even gotten up when one of them said, ‘fire him’ in Pulaar...they shot him and fired in the air as they left. They didn’t steal anything – I saw three bullets – on his side and leg – he was critical of Al-Irchad. They’d tried to recruit him since 2011 but he refused.²⁰

A witness to the killing of an alleged informant in Diguel Commune, in late June or early July 2017, said:

He wasn’t careful...he’d recently returned from exile in Cote d’Ivoire and used to boast about having the numbers of security force members on his phone. He said, ‘I survived the violence in Abidjan, I can survive this!’ We warned him to be more careful, but he kept saying, ‘They can’t kill me!’ but they did.....He’d just returned home from the boutique when they drove up and opened fire on him.....I counted four gunshot wounds. They’d hidden their guns inside their boubous.²¹

A local trader described seeing the decapitated body of an elderly man in late 2017. Three villagers said they believed the man had been targeted because of his work as a guide for the Environmental Police, a force which has been attacked on several occasions by armed

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 21, 2018.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

Islamist groups.²² “We heard about his abduction from a village 12 kilometers from Nassoumbou, where he used to take his animals for water, and nine days later we found him...I was there when his family came for his body...they were in shock. I heard his head was left close to the office of the Environmental Police (Eaux et Forêts.) but I couldn’t bear to go.”²³

²² In French : La Direction Générale des Eaux et Forêts. A paramilitary force responsible for implementing national wildlife policy, protecting natural resources and conducting military training for forestry agents.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

Attacks on Education by Islamist Armed Groups in Northern Burkina Faso

We were making progress in getting more children from northern Burkina Faso to enroll in school, but since 2016 the insecurity has set us back and reversed this trend.

— Education official in Ouagadougou, March 2018.

Education sector workers described several threats and attacks against schools and teachers by armed Islamists which began in January 2017. The majority of attacks were directed at schools in Soum Province, where armed Islamist groups are most active, but from November 2017, there have been several threats against schools in the Oudalan province, as well as in Burkina’s Nord and Est regions.

Human Rights Watch documented threats against teachers; the killing of a school director and a teacher; and the abduction of a teacher and death of a student, reportedly by stray bullets, during the same incident.

Witnesses from a dozen villages described armed Islamists travelling on motorcycles threatening teachers to change their secular curriculum to Quranic education and to replace the language of instruction from French to Arabic. Said one teacher: “The message is clear, ‘don’t teach in French and if you insist, we’ll kill you.’”

While students have not been directly targeted with violence, the attacks and general insecurity in the north have resulted in the flight of teachers and school closures, thereby undermining the right to education.

A representative of a national teacher’s union said that from early 2016 until the end of February 2018, at least 219 primary and secondary schools in the north had been closed on account of the threats, leaving 20,163 students out of school. He said schools in the more

isolated rural areas close to the borders with Mali and Niger were particularly vulnerable to the threats.²⁴

At an April 19, 2018 cabinet meeting where threats on education was discussed, it was further noted that that 895 teachers from the Sahel and Nord regions had been affected by school closures.²⁵

Education officials said the Sahel region has historically had one of the lowest rates of primary school attendance and that they feared the attacks in the region would reverse recent progress in increasing children's access to education.²⁶

The primary school enrollment rate in the Sahel Region has been the lowest in the country for over a decade. In the 2014-2015 school year, before the outbreak of violence in the region, the primary school gross enrollment rate was 51.9 percent compared to 83.7 percent nationally.²⁷

Security sources said the threats and attacks against the education sector were being carried out by both Ansaroul and the ISGS.²⁸ *Agence France Press* reported that ISGS took responsibility for the April 12, 2018 abduction of primary school teacher Issouf Souabo in Bourou (in Soum Province, 40 kilometers from Djibo).²⁹ The ISGS spokesman reportedly said the teacher had been targeted for teaching in French.³⁰ A witness to the abduction, which also resulted in the death of student Sana Sakinatou, told Human Rights Watch:

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with representative of the National Teachers Union, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2018, and with teacher from Oudalan Province, March 18, 2018.

²⁵ "Fermeture des classes au Sahel et au Nord: Les enseignants et les élèves devraient retourner bientôt en classe," *LeFaso.net*, April 20, 2018, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article83032> (accessed April 23, 2018).

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with representative of the National Teachers Union, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2018, and with teacher from Oudalan Province, March 18, 2018.

²⁷ Ministry of the Economy, Finances, and Development, National Institute for Statistics and Demography (INSD), "Annuaire Statistique 2014," December 2015, http://www.insd.bf/n/contenu/pub_periodiques/annuaire_stat/Annuaire_stat_nationaux_BF/Annuaire_stat_2014.pdf (accessed April 26, 2018) p.91.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with security analysts, Ouagadougou, February 9, 2018, February 21, March 17, 2018.

²⁹ "Burkina Faso: le groupe jihadiste EIGS revendique le rapt d'un enseignant," *RFI Afrique*, April 18, 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180418-burkina-faso-le-groupe-jihadiste-eigs-revendique-le-rapt-enseignant> (accessed May 10, 2018).

³⁰ "Jihadists abduct Burkina teacher 'for speaking French'," *Expatica*, April 17, 2018, https://www.expatica.com/fr/news/country-news/Burkina-attack-kidnapping_1815096.html (accessed April 23, 2018).

At around 4 p.m., when children were in class, around five armed men came to the school – they fired a round of shots in the air – people started running in all different directions. During the panic, the confusion, a student of CM2, was shot...he was not targeted but it hit him anyway. The teacher, who had just started teaching there, was not able to escape – he was taken by force by the attackers...they left toward the North.³¹

The March 3, 2017 alleged killing by armed Islamists of 28 year-old Salifou Badini, the director of Kourfayel Primary school (7 kilometers from Djibo) and another man provoked the panicked departure of scores of teachers from northern Burkina Faso. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, however Burkina Faso's then-minister of Education, blamed the killing on armed men “trying to create a general psychosis to stop education” in the country.³² A family member told Human Rights Watch:

I was called at 10:47 a.m. saying Salifou was dead. I called him but there was no answer. The primary school had three classes and taught kids from 7 to 10. His body was behind the school, on other side of the window – as if he was trying to escape. He'd been shot in the head, chest and back. A villager who acted as messenger was also killed, inside the school in a small office. They were killed during the recess; thank God the children were not in class. The villagers said the men arrived on a motorcycle, their faces covered with turbans, and with automatic rifles. He was charismatic and funny. This was his third year at the school – he was loved, and the day he died I saw the children crying. We don't know why he was targeted. ³³

During the night of November 26, 2017, armed men attacked the residence of several teachers from the high school in Kain, (Yatenga Province, Nord region), killing one teacher, Koumayan Soulemane, and wounding two others. The attack provoked the flight of local government officials and the closure of several schools and the health center.³⁴ Witnesses to the attack and a school official interviewed by Human Rights Watch said the motive for

³¹ Human Rights Watch phone interview, Bourou, April 17 2018.

³² “Burkina Faso teachers return to school, seek support, after jihadist threats,” *Reuters*, April 26, 2017, <https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFKBN17S1AA-OZATP> (accessed April 23, 2018).

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

³⁴ Menaces terroristes au Nord: Inquiétude et consternation à Kaïn <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article82451>

the attack remained unclear, but that they suspected the armed Islamists, primarily because of the town's close proximity to areas of Mali where the armed Islamist presence is well-established. This case merits further investigation. A witness said:

At around 10:15 p.m., I saw a few of the teachers chatting outside their house. Soulemane was inside preparing his lessons. Suddenly, there was the sound of a motorcycle, and off in the distance the movement of men...then a loud noise, which I thought was a tire exploding. Then, suddenly, shots rang out,they armed men shot on the teachers house, breaking the windows. They went inside, killing Soulemen and wounding two others As the armed men left, they stole two motorcycles. The attacked has provoked panic to this day. The schools are closed and we are frightened all the time, especially given how close we are to Malian villages where those people (armed Islamists) are.³⁵

A local official responsible for documenting attacks on education in the Sahel Region said that on November 14, 2017, two armed Islamists confronted the director of a small school near Deou in the early evening as he was preparing lessons. "They asked the director what language he taught in, told him teaching in French was Haram, and asked him to recite the Quran. They ordered him to close the school, burned his motorcycle and fired in the air as they left. Ironically, they themselves were speaking in French." He described a similar incident, on January 21, 2018, at a school near Tin-Akoff. Both schools were subsequently abandoned by the teachers.³⁶

An elder from Baraboulé described a spate of attacks on schools and threats against teachers in his area. "In February 2017 they threatened teachers in Lassa, Pelem Pelem, Fetakouba and other villages, saying 'we don't want to come here and find you teaching in French.' In March 2017, I rushed to the Baraboulé Primary school after Ansaroul had set it alight and found the blackboard, tables and benches burning. The state rebuilt it already – they're trying to stop kids from losing a year of education."³⁷

³⁵ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Ouagadougou, April, 26, 2018.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ministry of Education official from the Sahel Region, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2018.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

Teachers and community leaders said four factors had made teachers more vulnerable to attack and intimidation. First, most teachers were contracted and paid by the state, and provoking their flight furthered the Islamists agenda of ridding the north of state institutions. Second, Ansaroul Islam was punishing teachers who had received benefits from Al-Irchad but refused to support the group's evolution into an armed insurgency. As articulated by a teacher's union official, "Al-Irchad had adopted a strategy of paying the debts taken on by teachers, including for buying land, constructing their houses, or educating their children. This practice indebted the teachers to [them]. At first, teachers thought it was an act of charity until they realized what Irchad was asking of them."³⁸ Third was the perception that some teachers were being used to provide intelligence to the security services. Lastly, as noted by one teacher: "If you want to get recruits, waging war with their heads through indoctrination at an early age is a good way to go."³⁹

In responding to the April 12, 2018 abduction by ISGS of a teacher and killing of a student in Bourou village, Prime Minister Paul Kaba Thiéba, and Minister of Education and Literacy, Stanislas Ouaro, announced plans to strengthen school security in the north, to ensure students were able to finish their courses and take exams on time, and to provide psychological care for students and teachers impacted by the insecurity.⁴⁰

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with representative from the National Teachers Union, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2018.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with local teacher, Ouagadougou, March 20, 2018.

⁴⁰ "Fermeture des classes au Sahel et au Nord: Les enseignants et les élèves devraient retourner bientôt en classe," LeFaso.net, April 20, 2018, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article83032> (accessed April 23, 2018)

Militant Attacks in Ouagadougou

Even war isn't like this....in war your enemy gives you a chance to fight for your life.

— Street vender wounded in January 15, 2016 attack in Ouagadougou, March 2018

Seven survivors of brutal assaults on Ouagadougou hotels, cafés and other gathering places in Ouagadougou described the attacks to Human Rights Watch. On January 15, 2016, three gunmen opened fire on the terrace of *le Cappuccino* café and later attacked the Splendid hôtel, and 'maquis' Taxi Brousse. Thirty people from at least 11 countries were killed and over 70 wounded. The dead included eight Burkinabè, four members of a Ukrainian family, including a nine-year old child, and four members of a Canadian family. One victim explained:

At first, I thought it was a robbery, but when they turned on the clients, we knew it was something else. Over 40 of us rushed into the bathroom where, pressed together, we turned off our phones and prayed. Only God stopped the terrorists from coming in. I listened to them walking around, shooting...pam pam...then 'Allahu Akbar.' We heard explosions – grenades they'd set off – which set the place on fire. As it filled with smoke, I started to suffocate and forced my way out, gasping for air, assuming I might be shot but I was dying in there. The owner lost his wife, his son, and his mother and sister in law...three generations hit by terrorism.

Another employee who survived the attack said, "Each time I come to work, I see the dead: three slumped on that table, five over there, two here. I live that day again and again and again."

A 28 year-old street vendor left disabled from a bullet lodged in his upper thigh said:

I was chatting on the terrace when three men with long guns heavily laden with ammunition appeared and took up position a few meters away.....I took off running but was hit and fell down. I was bleeding so much but dragged myself little by little while they continued killing people... I



Armed Islamist groups Al-Qaeda and Al-Mourabitoun claimed the January 15, 2016 attack on the “Cappuccino” restaurant and cafe in Ouagadougou, which killed 30 people and left more than 70 wounded.

© 2016 Joe Penney/Reuters

shielded myself behind a vehicle then used my belt to stop the bleeding,....
I passed out and only came to because my shoe had caught fire from petrol
leaking from a burning car.⁴¹

On August 13, 2017, two men opened fire on the terrace of the Aziz Istanbul Patisserie Café. Before the attackers were killed by members of the Special Intervention Unit of the National Gendarme (USIGN), 18 people, the majority of them Burkinabès, and victims from seven other nations would be dead and over 20 wounded. No one has claimed responsibility for this attack.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 21, 2018.

A security guard said:

The place was packed with people celebrating two birthdays. At around 9 p.m. two men on a moto crashed into a car in front of the Istanbul. We laughed that people these days don't know how to drive. But then they got up, took out guns and started shooting into all those people celebrating. I ran for my life, thinking, 'Oh God, not again.' Hours later, in hiding, I saw them taking out the bodies, one by one. I'd left my phone on charge and when I finally reached home, my family burst into tears seeing I was alive.⁴²

On March 2, 2018, Al-Qaeda-affiliate JNIM targeted Burkinabè army headquarters and the French Embassy, reportedly in retaliation for the killing of some of their members by French forces in Mali.⁴³ No civilians were killed, however dozens were wounded.

⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 23, 2018.

⁴³ "Al Qaeda affiliate claims responsibility for Burkina Faso attacks," Reuters, March 3, 2018m <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-burkina-security/al-qaeda-affiliate-claims-responsibility-for-burkina-faso-attacks-idUSKCN1GFoGS> (accessed April 23, 2018).

Burkina Faso Security Force Violations

“When the security forces kill in the name of terrorism, they are acting no better than the jihadists. The state has laws; it has signed international conventions. It must take the moral high ground and be better than they are.”

— Burkinabè human rights defender, February 2018.

Human Rights Watch documented 14 alleged summary executions by state security forces, and four deaths in their custody. Several other cases witnesses believe implicate members of the security forces merit further investigation. All of the alleged abuses occurred in 2017 and early 2018 within Soum Province, including around the towns of Nassoumbou, Djibo, Bourou, Baraboulé, Inata, Sona and Tchembolo. The majority occurred between September 2017 and February 2018.

Witnesses, community members and security sources said the alleged perpetrators were members of the Burkina Faso Army, the National Gendarmerie, two special units created to respond to the growing threat from armed Islamist groups (the Combined Anti-Terrorist Forces and the Special Intervention Unit of the National Gendarmerie), and to a lesser extent, the National Police.⁴⁴

The Combined Anti-Terrorist Forces (GFAT) is made up of both soldiers and gendarmes and is headquartered in Kaya, 100 kilometers from Ouagadougou.⁴⁵ GFAT units are based in several towns including Nassoumbou,⁴⁶ Koutougou,⁴⁷ Djibo, Dori, and Ouahigouya. The GFAT was formed under a 2012 decree to strengthen the defense and security forces and is

⁴⁴ In French : Les Forces Armées Nationales, Le Gendarmerie Nationale, La Police Nationale du Burkina Faso, Groupement des Forces Anti-Terroristes (GFAT), L'Unité Spéciale d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (l'USIGN).

⁴⁵ Decret no. 2013-121/PRES/PM/MDNAC du 12 mars portant modification du decret no. 2012-925/PRES/PM/MDNAC du 30 novembre 2012 portant creation d'unGroupement de Forces Antiterroriste. JO No. 34 du 22 Aout, 2013, President du Conseil des Ministres, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.legiburkina.bf/m/Sommaires_JO/Decret_2013_00121.htm (accessed April 13, 2018).

⁴⁶ “Nassoumbou : récit d'un témoin depuis sa fenêtre,” Sidwaya, December 18, 2016, <http://www.sidwaya.bf/m-14481-nassoumbou-recit-d-un-temoin-depuis-sa-fenetre.html> (accessed April 13, 2018).

⁴⁷ “Soum : Le groupement des forces antiterroristes de Koutougou victimes d'une attaque ce 31 octobre 2017,” Infowkat, October 31, 2017, <https://infowakat.net/soum-groupement-forces-antiterroristes-de-koutougou-victime-dune-attaque-31-octobre-2017/> (accessed April 13, 2018).



Soldiers from Burkina Faso take part in a training exercise in Burkina Faso on April 13, 2018.

© 2018 Issouf Sanogo/AFP/Getty Images

under the direct command of the Army Chief of Staff. Security sources said GFAT's troops rotate from field bases every three months.⁴⁸

The Special Intervention Unit of the National Gendarme (USIGN) is an elite 300-strong special counter-terrorism unit within the national gendarme.⁴⁹ While operational since 2012, it was formally created by a 2015 decree signed by authorities in the transitional government. USIGN is tasked with the fight against terrorism, including hostage releases and gathering intelligence, and the fight against organized crime.⁵⁰ The unit, part of the defense and Security Forces, is based in Ouagadougou, attached to the National Gendarme and is under the command of the Chef d'Etat-major of the Gendarme.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with security experts, Ouagadougou, February 19, 2018; March 22, 2018; March 23, 2018.

⁴⁹ Gendarmerie Nationale du Burkina Faso, "Présentation," undated, <http://gendarmerienationale.bf/7-2/> (accessed April 12, 2018).

⁵⁰ "Unité Spéciale d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale: Une unité d'Elite aux grandes ambitions avec peu de moyens," *LePays*, February 11, 2016, <http://lepays.bf/unite-speciale-dintervention-de-la-gendarmerie-nationale-une-unite-delite-aux-grandes-ambitions-avec-peu-de-moyens/> (accessed April 10, 2018).

Most witnesses were unable to identify the individual security force members, commanders or particular units involved in the security force violations described below, with most simply describing the alleged perpetrators as “soldiers” or “gendarmes.” Similarly, most witnesses did not distinguish between the army and GFAT or between the gendarmerie and USIGN.

Witnesses did, however, clearly describe those involved as dressing in military uniform, driving in state vehicles known to be used by the security forces and, in a few cases, being detained by soldiers manning checkpoints or being detained within well-known bases.

The numbers of alleged perpetrators involved in the abuses documented varied: some incidents involved a few security force members while others took place in the context of large operations involving numerous vehicles filled with security force personnel.

About a dozen witnesses described seeing bodies along roads and on footpaths near the towns of Djibo, Nassoumbou, and Bourem, among others. They and people with knowledge of the incidents said most of these men had last been seen in the custody of government security forces based or operating in or around the same towns. Several witnesses said some of the alleged killings occurred shortly after armed Islamist attacks which had killed or injured security forces members or local government officials.

Diplomats, aid workers and community leaders expressed concerns about what they said was a spate of unlawful killings by the security forces in the second half of 2017. A diplomat told Human Rights Watch, “it is widely known in the north that several people arrested by the security forces have been found dead the next day. It was especially bad in late 2017. No one is addressing this problem.”⁵¹ A humanitarian worker who had tracked the incidents said several killings directly followed attacks in which security force members had died.⁵² A local business woman and humanitarian worker from the Soum said, “to find bodies on the roads is not normal yet no one is denouncing it.” A security source with knowledge of the killings said he believed the bodies were left in the open “as part of a strategy to frighten people from joining Ansaroul.”⁵³

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with diplomat, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with humanitarian workers, February 21, 2018.

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

A few witnesses from Nassoumbou said they believed soldiers based in the Nassoumbou and whom they believed to be from the GFAT were responsible for some abuses. An army communique from January 15, 2018 noted that “GFAT units carry out daily operations in the north of Burkina Faso” to help secure the region.⁵⁴

Two security experts, witnesses and two community leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch alleged the involvement of USIGN personnel in a few of the killings described in this report. One of the security experts said some members of what he believed to be USIGN were based in the Sahel region from early 2017 until February 2018 and operated out of different gendarmerie headquarters. “They work closely with the state security services to identify alleged terrorists – on the basis of lists – and are responsible for some of the bodies turning up on the streets. They’re giving the other gendarmes a bad rap.”⁵⁵

Several residents of villages and towns in the north interpreted the security force response to a given killing, or lack thereof, as one indicator of their responsibility in some of the abuses. One elder explained: “When the Jihadists are suspected in a killing, the security forces react differently; they launch an investigation, they take over the whole village often blocking entrances; they make arrests; they denounce it on the radio, on social media, in statements. When a body shows up and they don’t do any of that, we suspect the security forces. The suspicion is even stronger when the authorities detain or summon for questioning other members of the deceased man’s family.”⁵⁶

The vast majority of victims of security force abuse in the cases documented were ethnic Peuhl. A village elder noted, “some of those arrested have ties to the Jihadists, and if they are a terrorist, yes, of course, arrest, try and convict them. But too many of us are beaten or worse, executed by the same people who are paid to protect us.”⁵⁷

Numerous Peuhl leaders said the abuse was encouraging members of their community to join the armed groups. One village chief observation was typical: “Their harsh behavior is driving people to Ansaroul.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ “Communique de Presse,” National Armed Forces of Burkina Faso press release, January 15, 2018, https://drive.google.com/file/d/11z5RnTl3KHvqK1XrnOMFIT_mol-qSKd/view (accessed May 2, 2018).

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with security experts, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with village elder, Ouagadougou, March 17, 2018.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with village chief, Ouagadougou, February 16, 2018.

Alleged Extrajudicial Executions

On December 27, 2017, soldiers detained 27 men as they fled Damba hamlet following an incursion and attempted kidnapping of a village man by Islamists. After spending one night in detention within a security force camp in Sona, eight of the men were separated from the larger group and killed. The remaining men were transferred to an army and later gendarme camp in Djibo. One of five witnesses to the events interviewed by Human Rights Watch explained:

Jihadists came to Damba to kidnap a Songhoi resident, so the Peuhl (of Damba) – fearing an army operation – decided to flee until things calmed down. The soldiers encircled the village looking for Jihadists and started detaining us. They confiscated our ID cards, blindfolded us with our turbans, tied our hands and put 27 of us in a large military truck. It was a big operation – with several vehicles and dozens of soldiers. Before leaving, they set a house and two motorcycles on fire. Two men tried to flee and were badly beaten. At twilight we arrived to Sona camp about 10 kilometers away. They called us one by one out of the vehicle, took off our blindfolds and ordered us into a building in the camp; we were not beaten. The next morning, the soldiers called us one by one by our names, put the blindfolds back on and ordered us into a waiting military vehicle. But eight names were not called; they were the ones whose bodies were later found....two of them were brothers, most were from the same big family. They took the rest of us to Djibo military camp where we spent eight days, and later the gendarmerie where we were interrogated. Of our group of 27, eight were killed, four sent to prison in Ouagadougou and the rest of us were freed. Why would they do this to my village...we too fear Ansaroul. ⁵⁹

A security source and two witnesses said the Sona camp houses a detachment of gendarmes who were originally deployed there to secure a nearby goldmine, which has now suspended operations. They said they believe it is now used periodically by soldiers when conducting military operations in the area.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Ouagadougou, March 20, 2018.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with two witnesses and a security source, Ouagadougou, March 20, 2017; March 22, 2017; and by telephone, April 28, 2017.

Two other witnesses described the location where the eight men were allegedly shot. One said: “We buried seven men in two common graves some 12 miles from Damba. We found five in one place and the others, 100 meters or so away. All had been shot, some in the head...some were blindfolded, others bound by the hands. One man was still breathing....he was taken to a nearby village.”⁶¹

A witness who cared for the wounded man said: “he kept asking for water...he’d been shot in the intestines. When the authorities heard he was alive, they detained him again but the gendarmes in Nassoumbou called to tell us he’d died a few hours later; that we should come for the body.”⁶²

Security sources and two diplomats told Human Rights Watch they believed the killing of Moumouni Moussa Dicko, an animal merchant and local government official from Kérboulé (Nassoumbou Commune) was carried out by members of the security services.⁶³ A community elder said he had complained about his killing by members of the security services to members of the government.

Two witnesses spoke with Mr. Dicko after he had been summoned on September 27, 2017 by gendarmes based in Djibo. His body was found the next morning. “I was with Moumouni when he received a call; after hanging up he told me, ‘I was just called by [name withheld]; he needs me to stop by the gendarmerie.’”⁶⁴

Another witness said, “I saw Moumouni in Djibo at around 5 p.m., near the market; he told me he was buying something to give the gendarmes; that he was on his way in to see them. At 6 a.m. the next day I saw a body lying on the road as I was leaving the Djibo bus station...they called me to say it was Moumouni.”⁶⁵ A third witness described seeing his body in the morgue on September 28, “with an impact in the chest. I called his family, asking after Moumouni, but they said, ‘he was summoned by the gendarmes last night...we don’t know what’s going on but we’re bringing him food later today.’ I couldn’t bear to tell

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 20, 2018.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interviews with security sources, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018 and March 22, 2018; and members of the diplomatic community, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018 and March 18, 2018.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 21, 2018.

them what I knew.”⁶⁶ A friend of the family said several members of Mr. Dicko’s family were later themselves arrested and held for questioning within the gendarmerie.⁶⁷

On October 13, 2017, Franco-Arab teacher Amadou Dicko, 45 years-old, was forced onto a motorcycle as he was leaving the mosque after evening prayers in the sector 4 neighborhood of Djibo. His body was found several hours later. Two security analysts, community leaders and a member of the diplomatic community told Human Rights Watch their inquiries into this case suggested security force involvement.⁶⁸ A witness from Djibo said:

We were together in the early evening and agreed to meet up later, but minutes later I got a frantic call from a friend saying he’d just seen Amadou abducted by three men with pistols dressed in civilian attire, that he’d been forced onto their motorcycle, fighting. We heard gunshots sometime later, and later that night found his body less than a mile away on the road going from Djibo to Ouagadougou. He was on his back, with a bullet on the side. We called the police to file a complaint, they went, but were grumbling about him being a jihadist.⁶⁹

A merchant described the early March 2018 detention by soldiers of Sadou Moumouni Dicko, around 45, who worked as a camel porter in the Nassoumbou market. “From 10 meters away, I saw two soldiers on a Yamaha [motorcycle] and armed with Kalashnikovs in the market. Sadou had just arrived and tied up his camel. The soldiers seemed to be looking for him. They asked for his ID, and when they verified it was him, they handcuffed him, put him between the two of them on their motorcycle, and drove away. We heard gunshots later that day, and found his body the next day in Fina, a small hamlet just north of Nassoumbou; face down, with his eyes bound. He’d been shot in the head.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with security sources, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018 and March 22, 2018; member of the diplomatic community, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018; and community leaders, Ouagadougou, March 17, 2018.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

In late November 2017, the bodies of two traders a witness said had been arrested at an army checkpoint as they were leaving the Nassoumbou market to return to their village, called Tem, were found the next day some four kilometers south. The witness said:

One had come to buy animal feed and the other to sell his iron wares. I'd also been at the market that day selling. The army checkpoint is a few kilometers north of the market and they were arrested around 16hr and put in a pickup. I'm sure the checkpoint is manned by the Army, we see their cars leaving the camp, going to the checkpoint and then returning. The dead... their faces were totally covered with their turbans... it looked like they'd been shot in the head...blood had soaked their clothing. Later the families came to take their bodies for burial. I heard their people (family members) complaining that the gendarmes refused to investigate the incident but had, they themselves, been interrogated as suspects.⁷¹

A witness described seeing three bodies near Nassoumbou over the course of a week while he was searching for his 25-year-old relative who'd last been seen after having been detained by soldiers near Bourou, in November 2017. One of the dead was his family member; the other two victims are discussed below. He said:

A friend called around 4 p.m. saying 'the soldiers just took [name withheld] as he was walking back from market!' The next day I asked for help from the security forces in Nassoumbou...all they said was, "you should tell the Jihadists to stop attacking us.' A week after [name withheld] disappeared, I was told of another body near Kabakoy village. As soon as I saw, I knew. His hands were tied, his body swollen, with three holes in the chest, two in the head. I called a gendarme to ask them to make a report, but all he said, was, 'you should just bury him.'⁷²

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

Suspected Summary Executions Meriting Further Investigation

Witnesses, civil society leaders and village leaders described eight other cases of alleged unlawful killings by those they suspected were members of the security forces. Human Rights Watch was unable to speak with direct witnesses of these cases, but we believe all of them merit further investigation.

One witness searching for his family member detained by the security forces near Bourou (see Alleged Extrajudicial Executions section) described seeing two other bodies before finding that of his family member. He speculated that one of them had similarly been detained and killed by the security forces. He said:

Two days after my family member was detained I heard there was a body one kilometer south of the Nassoumbou army camp. I went expecting to see him but instead a few meters off the road was another man; blindfolded and bound...he'd been shot several times – in the head and neck; later residents of Bourou village told me his name and said that he had been gone missing after being arrested by soldiers based in Nassoumbou. Later that day, I learned of another body – but again it wasn't my relative – his hands had been tied with a rubber cord...he'd been dead for a few days.⁷³

One man was allegedly killed after the killing of a village chief by armed Islamists: “We found a few bodies after the chief from Tem village was killed by Ansaroul. One was Issa Dicko who was killed in November [2017]; he'd come to Nassoumbou for a funeral and was arrested by the security forces in front of everyone while repairing his bike tire. I did not see his arrest but later saw his body on the left side of the road, several kilometers before Djibo. He was face down...his eyes bound with white cloth.”⁷⁴

In late September or early October 2017, two witnesses saw the bodies of three men a few kilometers south of the Inata gold mine (commune of Tongomayel). They had been told the men had previously been arrested by the security forces. A security analyst who closely

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

monitors attacks in the north told Human Rights Watch he believed the security forces had been involved in these killings, which merit further investigation.⁷⁵ A witness explained:

I'd gone to Tchembolo to buy millet and the whole village was talking about the arrest, at around midnight, of three men who had been taken away by men in uniform, in a military vehicle. That same Friday I saw the bodies near the turnoff (crossroads) for Gomde. A few days later, I saw another body next to the fence that surrounds Inata mine. I knew two of the dead from Tchembolo...they were marabouts. After this, I fled to [Ouagadougou]...when they detain, kill or disappear your neighbor, you begin to fear your day is coming."⁷⁶

A community leader said the killings near Inata occurred shortly after attacks by armed Islamists in the same general vicinity had left several dead, including two gendarmes killed by an explosive device on September 26, 2017, and three civilians, all near Touronata.⁷⁷ These incidents, which were also reported in the media, merit further investigation.⁷⁸

A Tuareg rights group and family members told Human Rights Watch that in early December 2017, two Tuareg refugees from Mali, Abdou Ag Alhousseiny and Mohamed Ag Amano, had allegedly been mistreated and later killed at or near an army checkpoint near Ariel on December 1, 2017. They said the men had reportedly obtained travel authorization from Burkinabè authorities to leave the Mentao refugee camp in which they resided. Human Rights Watch was unable to speak with a direct witness to the arrest but was provided with photographs of the bodies and motorcycle of the deceased men.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with security analyst, Ouagadougou, March 19, 2018.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with community leader, April 28, 2018.

⁷⁸ "Avocet's convoy in Burkina Faso strikes landmine, killing two," Reuters, September 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-avocet-attack/avocets-convoy-in-burkina-faso-strikes-landmine-killing-two-idUSKCN1C223X> (May 3, 2018); "Touronata (Nord Burkina): trois personnes abattues par des hommes armés non identifiés," Net Afrique, September 28, 2017, <http://netafrique.net/touronata-nord-burkina-trois-personnes-abattues-par-des-hommes-armes-non-identifies/> (accessed May 3, 2018).

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tuareg rights group, Bamako February 6, 2018 and February 18, 2018, and email exchange December 9, 2017.

Mass Arrests and Mistreatment and Deaths in Detention

Community leaders complained of numerous instances in which the security forces appeared to randomly detain men who happened to be in the vicinity of incursions, attacks or ambushes by armed Islamist groups.

They characterized the arrests of the men, detained on their way to local markets, gathered at a watering hole, or in their village, as collective punishment. They said the vast majority of detainees were released after preliminary investigations by the local gendarmerie, suggesting the evidentiary basis for many of the detentions was weak.

A few witnesses said those involved were from the GFAT because they had observed military vehicles involved in large operations driving in and out of GFAT bases in Djibo and Nassoumbou. On January 15, 2018 the Burkina Faso National Armed Forces announced that recent GFAT security operations in the north of the country led to the arrest and questioning of more than 200 individuals suspected of engaging in terrorist activity, of whom 33 were detained for further inquiry, while the rest were released.⁸⁰

Human Rights Watch documented six such mass arrests which occurred during 2017 and early 2018. The abuse in detention described below occurred in the context of several of these mass arrests. Witnesses said the abuse was meted out by security force personnel during ad hoc interrogations in the first few days after detention and took place in army bases, villages and checkpoints. The abuse usually stopped when the detainees were handed over to government gendarmes, the witnesses said.

Human Rights Watch interviewed three health workers who provided medical care to men who had been detained in the mass arrests shortly after they were released from custody who described treating the cuts, bruises, hematomas and gashes numerous men had sustained during detention.

Three witnesses described the detention of some 15 men on January 29, 2018 shortly after an ambush by armed Islamists killed two policemen on the road between the villages of Baraboulé and Petegoli. Two of the detained men, one with a mental illness, died as a result of mistreatment meted out by both policemen and soldiers. One witness described

⁸⁰ “Communique de Presse,” National Armed Forces of Burkina Faso press release, January 15, 2018, https://drive.google.com/file/d/11z5RnTl3KHyyvqK1XrnOMFIT_mol-qSKd/view (accessed May 2, 2018).

the man's injuries: "he had black and blue marks and coagulated blood all over his body; and his face was visibly swollen."⁸¹ Another witness said:

The ambush happened around 6:30 a.m. The police asked for army reinforcement then started arresting shepherds who were watching their animals or going to market. I saw the police and soldiers beating them, severely, with wood, rubber cords and gun butts near the ambush site and on the way to the Djibo police station They insulted and threatened to kill them. Many were bleeding from gashes on their heads, arms and backs. They didn't eat or drink for two days. On around day four of their detention, they were taken out of the cell to have their photographs taken, but one detainee, who was mentally ill, didn't understand what was being asked of him; he resisted holding up the paper for the police photo. The policemen set upon him until he fell down, and continued to beat and kick him. After seeing how bad off he was, the policemen took him to the clinic, but he died shortly thereafter. A second man, who had been detained near the ambush site in Petagoli, died in the cell...the prisoners yelled, 'this man is sick...he's going to die, he needs water!' But a policeman said, 'forget it, you're all going to die here.' The prisoner gave up his soul (died) an hour later.⁸²

A villager described how soldiers detained and severely mistreated 11 men they had rounded up near a village in the Soum Province in early July 2017 shortly after an army vehicle in the area hit an explosive device, wounding several soldiers:

They rounded up all the men they found – young and very old – like they blamed the entire village. They ripped an old man's boubou to blindfold them, then beat them without mercy – with wood, belts and batons – the beating continued in the vehicles. They were all released after questioning, and all needed medical attention – their boubous [a long flowing garment] were stained with blood. Some had gashes on the head and another on his arm...he kept blocking his children from being hit – and got struck again

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Ouagadougou, March 19, 2018.

and again. We understand the need to question suspects, but some people are joining the Jihadists because of this mistreatment.⁸³

A resident of Nassoumbou said in late December or early January 2018, soldiers based in Nassoumbou and whom he believed were with the GFAT, detained over 20 men, many while in the village or while watching their animals; a few were later sent to the high security prison in Ouagadougou. He had witnessed some of the arrests and later visited three of the men after they had been released. “The men were seriously beaten...including a 70-year-old and two others who were around 50 years old. The eldest could not even get up – I saw a large wound on his head. Another man, had about four welts on his back. They told me they had been accused of selling petrol and sugar to the Jihadists.”⁸⁴

Human Rights Watch previously denounced the deaths of two other men after severe mistreatment during their detention by Burkinabè soldiers during a cross border operation into Mali on June 9, 2017.

Response from Military Authorities

The Head of Military Justice, Colonel Sita Sangaré in a March 23, 2018 interview with Human Rights Watch, noted the challenges posed by asymmetric warfare, when “your enemy does not conform to the laws of war and hides within the very population,” but insisted that “the Burkina Faso army is very conscious of the importance of respecting human rights and takes concrete measures to ensure respect for human rights law.” He said those measures include significant training, clear orders to protect human rights in all operations, and the presence of provost marshals, exercised by gendarmes, in operations.⁸⁵ He further noted that, “Our position is clear – there should be no impunity for abuses by our forces. If there are credible allegations which come to our attention, we will investigate.”

On May 9, 2018, Human Rights Watch sent the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Justice a letter detailing the major findings and recommendation contained in this report. On May

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2018.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Director of Military Justice, Colonel Sita Sangaré, Ouagadougou, March 23, 2018.

15, 2018, Human Rights Watch received the government’s response, from Burkina Faso’s Minister of Defense and Veterans affairs, Jean-Claude Bouda. (See appendix 1 and 2.)

In the letter, Mr. Bouda noted his government’s commitment to respecting human rights, and ensuring that all military personnel are trained in international humanitarian law, both as part of their training, and in advance of military operations.

Further, Mr. Bouda noted his agreement with and commitment to implementing the key recommendations contained in Human Rights Watch’s letter, “in particular, the government undertakes to conduct inquiries into all the cases of abuse cited which had not previously been brought to its attention.”

The letter states that the government is already aware of some allegations against the civilian population committed during the course of ongoing anti-terrorist operations in northern Burkina Faso, and that these allegations have given rise to “immediate action.” The letter notes one such case, which took place in Bahn, in Nord Region, which has led to both disciplinary action and a criminal case in front of the military tribunal of Ouagadougou.

Human Rights Watch welcomes these commitments and urges the government to faithfully follow through on them.

Importance of Provost Marshals

Security sources, diplomats and justice ministry officials emphasized the essential role of provost marshals — responsible for ensuring discipline and the rights of detainees during all military operations — in reducing allegations of abuses and ensuring respect for detainees.

One justice official noted, “It is they – the provosts — who know the law, who understand the basis of a detention, and who ensure the well-being of the detained. They should be part and parcel of all operations.”⁸⁶

Colonel Sita Sangaré said provost marshals are envisioned to be in all operations, adding that they do not always accompany soldiers into the theaters of operation, but

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with justice official, Ouagadougou, March 23, 2018.

rather, at times, respond from “the GFAT Command centers in Dori and Ouahigouya, when solicited by commanders.” He noted there were plans to increase their presence in ongoing GFAT operations.

Several security analysts and diplomats told Human Rights Watch they were concerned about both the lack of provosts in day to day operations and the serious allegations about the conduct of some gendarmes. One security source questioned: “Sure, provosts are important but how do we deal with the fact that the very security core - gendarmes – who exercise that role, are themselves implicated in some exactions?”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with security analyst, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018.

Justice for Victims of Crimes Related to Armed Islamist Attacks and Counter Terrorism Operations

The jihadists are running around killing people; some soldiers are detaining and killing people outside of the law; honestly, they're all acting like they'll never be held accountable. This is why justice, for everyone, is so important.

—Village elder from Nassoumbou, March 2018.

Victims of violence by both the armed Islamists and security forces have complained about the lack of, or slow pace of investigations into cases since 2016. Family members of victims of abuses by armed Islamists had received little information about investigations into their loved ones' killings and were not sure if suspects detained after the killings were being investigated for human rights abuses or crimes against the state.

Community leaders and families of victims of alleged state sponsored violence complained about what they perceived to be a one-sided response by the authorities: they said killings and abuses by armed Islamists almost always triggered an investigation and, often, arrests, while alleged abuses by security force personnel were rarely if ever investigated by either the security forces or the judiciary.⁸⁸

Several family members said gendarmes had refused to visit the crime scene or even file a report after the body of their family member was found. Village elders cited a few cases where bodies of those believed to have been executed by the security forces were left to decompose outside for days without triggering any official response.

An elder from Djibo spoke of the importance of impartial justice: "Everyone who lost a brother or father or husband deserves justice whether they were killed by the jihadists or the army. The lack of justice is a principal cause of radicalization and recruitment. The state has to restore confidence among the population and to do that, they have to be fair and impartial in everything including justice."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with victims, Ouagadougou, February and March 2018.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with village elder, Ouagadougou, February 17, 2018.

All suspects implicated in terrorism-related offenses are transferred to Ouagadougou's High Security Prison (*La Prison de Haute Securite*), and all of their cases are investigated and adjudicated by the Ouagadougou-based Specialized Judicial Unit Against Crime and Terrorism ("Pole Judiciaire Specialise dans la Repression des Actes de Terrorisme.")⁹⁰ The Specialized Unit was created by a December 2017 law and has dedicated judges, staff and a trial chamber. Numerous terrorism related crimes were already under investigation before the 2017 creation of the unit.⁹¹

Under Burkinabè law, terrorist infractions include attacks against civil aviation, sea vessels, and public transportation; attacks against individuals enjoying international protection, including diplomats; the taking of hostages; bombings; and association with criminal organizations.⁹²

A Ministry of Justice official told Human Rights Watch that, as of March 23, 2018, some 200 suspects accused of terrorism-related offenses including those which have killed civilians, were being held at the high security prison and were under investigation by the special unit, but that no single judgment had yet taken place.⁹³

None the victims of alleged abuse by state actors or their families interviewed had filed judicial complaints which, in the French system, could have triggered the opening of a criminal investigation by the local prosecutor. They had not done so both because they felt it was futile and because they feared reprisal. "No one is even courageous enough to file a case – this would be like asking for your own death," noted one man.⁹⁴ A family member of the men from Damba allegedly killed by the army in late December 2017 said:

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Ministry of Justice officials, Ouagadougou, March 22 and March 23, 2017.

⁹¹ Loi Portant création, organisation et fonctionnement d'un pôle judiciaire spécialisé dans la répression des actes de terrorisme, *L'Assemblée Nationale*, No. 006-2017/AN, 2017, <http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/loi-006-portant-pole-specialise-contre-le-terrorisme.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2018).

⁹² Loi no. 006-2017/AN Portant création, organisation et fonctionnement d'un pôle judiciaire spécialisé dans la répression des actes de terrorisme, *L'Assemblée Nationale*, <http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/loi-006-portant-pole-specialise-contre-le-terrorisme.pdf> (accessed May 3, 2018). The 2017 statute only lists "terrorist infractions as defined under present law" and "the financing of terrorism" as crimes to be investigated by the Specialized Judicial Unit Against Crime and Terrorism. However, Loi no. 084-2015, which modifies a December 2009 law authorizing the repression of terrorism in Burkina Faso, lists the infractions which constitute terrorism under Burkinabè law. Loi no. 084-2015/CNT, Portant modification de la loi no.060-2009/AN du 17 Decembre 2009, portant repression d'actes de terrorisme au Burkina Faso, *La conseil national de la transition*, http://apprendre-plus.shost.ca/documents/lois/loi_084.pdf (accessed May 3, 2018)

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ministry of Justice official, Ouagadougou, March 23, 2018.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with victims, Ouagadougou, February 21, 2018.

How could we possibly file a judicial complaint?...We are too afraid, we've already lost eight people from our village and don't want to lose anyone else. Our people are gone – forever - we have left it up to God.⁹⁵

Due Process Concern: Lack of Access to Lawyers

If the suspects had lawyers, half of these cases would be dropped by the investigative judges for lack of evidence.

—Justice Sector Professional, Ouagadougou, February 2018

Human rights defenders and family members of men detained for terrorism related cases said very few of them had legal representation. Scores of suspects had been detained for months and, in some cases, over a year, with no access to a lawyer. A civil society member who had worked with the detained said:

The evidentiary basis for many of these detentions is thin especially when multiple family members or villagers are picked up in large sweeps. Way too many detainees are being sent 200 miles away from family on the basis of an arrest warrant with next to no information in their files. In other cases, detainees have signed papers they couldn't even read; and yet next to none of them have lawyers to be able to make these points and secure their release.⁹⁶

A few human rights defenders said they had asked several lawyers to represent the detained, but that they had refused for fear of reprisal. They said the Ouagadougou attacks had generated considerable anger toward suspects detained in northern Burkina Faso, who were collectively blamed for the general climate of insecurity in the country. One noted, “When you see how vitriolic, how hateful the social media posts are about people from the north you can see why so few lawyers have stepped forward to represent the detained.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with victims, Ouagadougou, March 30, 2018.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with civil society members, Ouagadougou, March 17, 2018.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with human rights defenders, Ouagadougou, March 19, 2018.

Justice officials and international observers familiar with the anti-terrorism unit said that in recent months it has indeed released over 20 people whose cases were found to lack merit. Justice officials did however acknowledge the slow pace of investigations.

Slow Pace of Justice

Two ministry of justice officials and a member of the diplomatic community working in the justice sector identified several reasons why investigations within the anti-terrorism cell were moving slowly. First, was the complicated nature of the crimes which often involve international jurisdictions and occur in inaccessible and dangerous places. Second, was the insufficient level of detail contained in the suspect files they receive from the arresting law enforcement personnel (notably in the Sahel region) which significantly increases the investigative burden of the Bamako-based cell. Third was the dynamic of mass arrests by the army on the basis of limited suspicion, which significantly increased the workload of the Ouagadougou judicial authorities. Fourth was the urgent need for more personnel working within the cell, which at present only has two dedicated investigative judges. And Fifth, was the slow response to judicial inquiries relevant to their investigations on the part of regional governments.⁹⁸

Judicial and security sources noted the urgent need for more training and resources for field-based police and gendarmes so as to ensure better preliminary investigations and to ensure the over-burdened Bamako based cell isn't being sent cases which either lack merit or pertain to individuals accused of common crimes not within their jurisdiction. Lastly, a few judicial professionals noted the importance of better security for personnel working with the anti-terrorism judicial unit.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Ministry of justice officials, Ouagadougou, March 22 and March 23, 2018; and with member of diplomatic community, Ouagadougou, February 20, 2018.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with judicial and security force officials, Ouagadougou, February 17, and March 23, 2018.

International Support to Burkina Faso's Security Forces

In the context of bilateral cooperation, France has for several decades supported the Burkinabè security forces by providing both material support and training. At writing, France and Burkina Faso's structural defense cooperation consists mainly of officer training at the Superior Institute of Logistics of Ouagadougou, training and deployment support for G5 Sahel forces, human resources management, and logistical, material, and technical support for the Burkina Faso Air Force.¹⁰⁰ ¹⁰¹Support to the Burkinabè Air Force also includes pilot training, and the delivery of ULM TETRA planes as well as support for the operation and use of the aircrafts. ¹⁰²

Additionally, since 2017, France has helped strengthen the Burkinabè battalion of the G5 Sahel joint forces by, in coordination with Burkinabe military authorities, establishing an operational readiness training center in Dori, where personnel from the Burkinabè G5 battalion are trained. Since April 2018, at the request of the Burkinabè High Command, this training includes a module for international humanitarian law, carried out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in parallel with the military training modules.¹⁰³

French military forces from Operation Barkhane, an ongoing antiterrorism operation in the Sahel region which began in 2014, have engaged in several joint military operations with forces from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, including with forces from the GFAT, around their common borders.^{104, 105}

¹⁰⁰ French Embassy to Burkina Faso in Ouagadougou, "Mission de coopération de défense," September 27, 2017, <https://bf.ambafrance.org/Mission-de-Cooperation-de-Defense> (accessed May 1, 2018).

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with French cooperation source, Ouagadougou, May 15, 2018.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch email correspondence with French cooperation source, Ouagadougou, May 15, 2018.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with French cooperation source, Ouagadougou, May 15, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Defense and Former Combatants of Burkina Faso, "Partenariat pour lutter contre les Groupes Armés Terroristes," November 11, 2015, <http://www.defense.gov.bf/index.php/2014-09-18-15-34-51/du-commandement/178-accueil/380-operation-gamounan> (accessed May 1, 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of the Army of France, "Barkhane: Appuyer les forces partenaires dans la sécurisation de leurs frontières," March 17, 2016, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/operations/sahel/actualites/barkhane-appuyer-les-forces-partenaires-dans-la-securisation-de-leurs-frontieres> (accessed May 4, 2018).

France has also provided training and logistical support to Burkinabè gendarmes,¹⁰⁶ including to the USIGN, which is modeled after France’s National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN).¹⁰⁷ In October 2017, France donated 15 protective shields to the USIGN and the French ambassador to Burkina Faso confirmed the arrival of French gendarmes and police¹⁰⁸ to train the USIGN and Multipurpose Intervention Unit of the National Police (UIPPN) in Ouagadougou.¹⁰⁹ Training courses for these two intervention units, many of which have been running since 2014, include instruction on the legal frameworks for the use of force.¹¹⁰

The United States has provided more than \$54 million in security assistance to Burkina Faso since 2012. A US official noted that, “The United States and Burkina Faso engage in a number of military, law enforcement, and justice sector training, equipping, and professional education programs, including in counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance.”¹¹¹ Programs have included training to the military, law enforcement and justice sectors; the provision of personal protective, communications, and medical equipment; and professional education, including in counterterrorism and peacekeeping.¹¹²

Burkina Faso is a partner in the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program for peacekeeping and is a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, the latter of which is dedicated to including Burkina Faso’s capabilities to respond to terrorist attacks.¹¹³

The Department of Defense (DoD) has provided training, equipment, and other assistance to subordinate Burkinabè security force units that have operated under the command and

¹⁰⁶ “Unités d’élites : La France vole au secours du Burkina Faso,” *Burkina 24*, October 12, 2017, <https://burkina24.com/2017/10/12/unites-delite-la-france-vole-au-secours-du-burkina/> (accessed May 1, 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of the Interior of France, “Quelques gendarmeries du monde,” January 30, 2018, <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Actualites/Dossiers/Ces-gendarmes-venus-d-ailleurs/Quelques-gendarmeries-du-monde> (accessed April 23, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ “Sécurité : des balistiques pour la gendarmerie et la police,” *Faso Revue*, October 13, 2017, <https://kelgueka.wordpress.com/tag/usign/> (accessed May 2, 2018).

¹⁰⁹ “Unités d’élite : La France vole au secours du Burkina,” *Faso 24*, October 15, 2017, <http://faso24.com/news/unites-delite-la-france-vole-au-secours-du-burkina/> (accessed May 2, 2018).

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with French Cooperation course, Ouagadougou, May 15, 2018.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with US Official, Washington D.C., May 1, 2018.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with US Official, Washington D.C., May 1, 2018.

control of the GFAT, however not to the GFAT directly.¹¹⁴ In April 2014, US forces trained and provided body armor, uniforms, and vehicles to the counterterrorism company of the 25th regiment of the parachutist commando,¹¹⁵ a key contributor of soldiers to the GFAT.¹¹⁶ US support to the 25th regiment continued in 2016.¹¹⁷

Burkinabè security forces have for several years participated in the U.S. Africa Command's annual multi-nation training exercise, known as Operation Flintlock. In 2017, Burkina Faso hosted the operation.¹¹⁸

The US also works with civilian law enforcement actors across the country, focusing this year on protecting soft targets and working with investigators from the National Police and Gendarmerie assigned to Burkina Faso's special judicial police focused on terrorism cases.¹¹⁹

A Department of Defense spokesperson noted, that “prior to receiving Department of Defense-funded training, equipment, or other assistance, foreign security forces are vetted for past involvement in human rights violations...The Department of Defense Leahy law prohibits the Department of Defense from providing any training, equipment, or other assistance to a unit of a foreign security force if the Department of Defense has credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.”¹²⁰

In May 2017, the European Union and the Burkinabè Minister of Security formally announced a partnership on the Project to Support the Reinforcement of Interior Security (PARSIB). The project, carried out by the Belgian Cooperation with EU funding, provides training to improve management of national intelligence and crisis response and provides

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with Department of Defense Spokesperson, May 5, 2018.

¹¹⁵ United States Africa Command, “Burkina Faso Counter Terrorism Company receives training and equipment,” May 30, 2014, <http://www.africom.mil/media-room/article/23085/burkina-faso-counter-terrorism-company-receives-training-and-equipment> (accessed May 1, 2018).

¹¹⁶ “Lutte contre le terrorisme : Offensive communicationnelle ou les lignes bougent-elles vraiment au Nord ? » *Le Faso*, January 18, 2018, <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article81488> (accessed May 1, 2018).

¹¹⁷ “Contre le terrorisme : Tulinabo Mushingi expose ses ‘trois D’ chez Salif Diallo,” *Burkina 24*, February 3, 2016, <https://burkina24.com/2016/02/03/contre-le-terrorisme-tulinabo-mushingi-expose-ses-trois-d-chez-salif-diallo/> (accessed May 1, 2018). And <https://burkina24.com/2016/09/09/lutte-anti-terroriste-la-premiere-region-militaire-a-son-unite-d-intervention/>

¹¹⁸ United States Army, “Flintlock 2017 opens in Burkina Faso,” March 1, 2017, https://www.army.mil/article/183404/flintlock_2017_opens_in_burkina_faso (accessed May 4, 2018).

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with US Official, Washington, D.C., May 1, 2018.

¹²⁰ The US Department of Defense's legislative authority that permits the capacity building of such foreign security forces requires training on human rights and the law of armed conflict. Human Rights Watch email exchange with US Department of Defense Spokesperson, May 5, 2018.

technical assistance in support of a larger plan for security sector reform. A key component of the program is the training, carried out by members of the Belgian Federal Police, of counterterrorism units called Anti-Banditry and Terrorism Brigades (ABTs). These units are equally staffed by gendarmes and police and are primarily stationed in the greater Ouagadougou area.¹²¹ All the intervention units are coordinated by the Burkinabè Unified Center on Crisis Management (CUGC), a security, intervention and antiterrorism organization within the cabinet of the Minister of Security.¹²²

Germany has also pledged to support the training of Burkina Faso's security forces. Following the August 2017 attack on the Aziz Istanbul Café in Ouagadougou, then-Parliamentary States Secretary in the Ministry of Defense, Ralf Brauksiepe confirmed that Germany would expand its involvement in the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali¹²³ to include the training of soldiers from Burkina Faso.¹²⁴

In June 2017, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger ramped up the G5 Sahel multinational counterterrorism military force. First established in 2014, the G5 Sahel was endorsed by the African Union and welcomed by the UN Security Council in 2017. The G5 Sahel has received considerable funding pledges from the international community including from the EU, which pledged €50 million (approximately US\$59 million), the US, which pledged \$60 million, and Saudi Arabia, which pledged €100 million (approximately US\$119 million) in support of G5-Sahel operations.¹²⁵ The EU doubled its contribution to G5 Sahel from €50 million to €100 million following a February 2018 donor conference in Brussels.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch email correspondence with security source, Ouagadougou, April 24, 2018 and May 14, 2018.

¹²² Delegation of the European Union to Burkina Faso, "Projet PARSIB: 'La Sécurité pour le développement du Burkina Faso'," July 21, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/burkina-faso/30224/projet-parsib-%C2%AB-la-s%C3%A9curit%C3%A9-pour-le-d%C3%A9veloppement-du-burkina-faso-%C2%BB_fr (accessed April 23, 2018).

¹²³ The Press and Information Office of the Federal Government of Germany, "President of Burkina Faso Visits Berlin, Intensifying political relations," March 21, 2017, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2017/03_en/2017-03-21-merkel-trifft-stp-burkina-faso_en.html (accessed April 30, 2018).

¹²⁴ "Burkina Faso soldiers to get counter-terrorism training from Germany," *Africanews*, August 18, 2017, <http://www.africanews.com/2017/08/18/burkina-faso-soldiers-to-get-counter-terrorism-training-from-germany/> (accessed April 30, 2018)

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2018* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), Mali chapter, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/mali>.

¹²⁶ "EU doubles funds for G5 Sahel military anti-terror security force," *DW*, February 23, 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/eu-doubles-funds-for-g5-sahel-military-anti-terror-security-force/a-42711948> (accessed May 1, 2018).

Recommendations

To the Government of Burkina Faso

- Ensure that everyone taken into custody by government security forces is treated humanely, is promptly brought before a judicial authority to ensure the legality of their detention and is able to contact their families.
- During any operations involving military personnel, ensure the inclusion of military police – or those exercising the provost marshal function – mandated to monitor and respond to any abuse and liaise with the relevant judicial authorities.
- Investigate and prosecute, in accordance with international fair trial standards, members of the security forces responsible for serious human rights violations, regardless of position or rank, including commanding officers.
- Send on administrative leave pending investigations security force personnel credibly implicated in abuses.
- Provide assistance to local authorities who have inadequate capacity to carry out credible, impartial, and independent investigations and prosecutions. Consider seeking international assistance to the extent necessary to meet this goal.
- Ensure all persons accused of criminal offenses have access to adequate legal representation regardless of their means, and that they have access to prompt and fair trials as required under international law.
- Improve conditions in detention centers, in particular by ensuring adequate nutrition, sanitation, and medical care.
- Increase the number of judicial personnel working within the Specialized Judicial Unit Against Crime and Terrorism.
- Take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and adequate security of all members of the judiciary working within the Specialized Judicial Unit Against Crime and Terrorism.

To Armed Islamist Groups Operating in Burkina Faso

- Cease all extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and other serious human rights abuses, as well as threats of violence against community members.

- Immediately cease all attacks and threats against schools, students, teachers, professors and education personnel. Facilitate impartial and unhindered access to organizations providing humanitarian assistance.

To the National Human Rights Commission of Burkina Faso

- Conduct impartial, public investigations into alleged human rights abuses by security force personnel and armed Islamist groups.
- Investigate alleged human rights violations associated with the detention of people suspected of links to armed Islamist groups, including scrutiny of detention conditions and respect for fair trial rights.

To Burkina Faso’s International Partners

- Call upon the government to conduct prompt, credible investigations into allegations of killings, mistreatment of detainees, and other abuses by Burkina Faso security forces.
- Support efforts to provide legal counsel for the indigent in criminal cases.
- Support human rights training for Burkina Faso security forces involved in counterterrorism operations.
- Refrain from funding Burkina Faso Security Forces units that are credibly found to abuse human rights and make resumption of funding to such units contingent on steps to remediate, address the abuses, and hold those responsible to account.

To the Government of the United States

- Fully implement the Leahy Law, which prohibits the provision of military assistance to any foreign security force unit if there is credible evidence that such a unit has committed gross human rights violations, and suspend assistance to the security force units implicated in abuse until the Burkinabè government takes steps to remediate, address the abuses, and hold those responsible to account.

Acknowledgments

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Human Rights Watch thanks the many witnesses and victims who provided testimony for this report, often at great personal risk, as well as the organizations and individuals who connected us to them. We are also grateful to the government officials, humanitarian workers, civil society activists, community leaders and diplomats who shared their experiences and views with us. Given security considerations, we cannot thank them here by name, but their support and courage greatly facilitated our research.

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Appendix I:

Letter to the Ministries of National Defense and Former Combatants and Justice, Human Rights and Civic Promotion of Burkina Faso

May 9, 2018

Colonel Sita SANGARE
Directeur de la Justice Militaire
Ministère de la Défense Nationale et des Anciens Combattants

M. Paul KABRE
Directeur de la Protection Contre les Violations des Droits humains
Ministère de la Justice, Des Droits Humains et de la Promotion Civique

Re : Publication of a report on human rights violations in northern Burkina Faso

Dear Colonel SANGARE and Mr. KABRE,

I hope this letter finds you well. I write to you, as my focal points within the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Justice, to both thank you for taking the time to meet in March 2018, and to share the conclusions of our research.

As discussed in our respective meetings, the letter is envisioned to provide the government advanced notice of our findings, which will be published in a report on May 17. We would be happy to include an official response in the communique which will accompany the report's release.

The report contains testimony and documents alleging human rights abuses in northern Burkina Faso by both armed Islamist groups and members of the security forces, particularly in Sahel Region, as well as testimony from the attacks in Ouagadougou.

The report is based on two research missions in February and March 2018, during which I conducted 67 interviews with victims and witnesses of abuse; health workers; local government officials;

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diplomats; security sector analysts; and youth, religious and community leaders.

With respect to abuses by **armed Islamist groups**, we documented alleged execution-style killings of 19 men by Islamist armed groups, which took place in or near 12 different villages.

The killings documented took place in or near Djibo, Nassoumbou, Tem, Sona, Dohouré, Koutougou, Kenou, Kourfayel, Soboulé, Yorsala and Pétéga and Kain.

- Those targeted included village counselors, mayors, village elders, marabouts, retired security force members, and teachers.
- Most victims were targeted for allegedly providing information to the security forces.
- Most had been killed in their homes or villages; a few had been held in bush camps in Burkina Faso or Mali for several days before being killed.

The report contains numerous testimonies of witnesses to these incidents, as well as witnesses and victims of the brutal 2016 and 2017 attacks in **Ouagadougou**. We also present our findings on the numerous **attacks on the education sector** including the killing or kidnapping of teachers, threats and intimidation of teachers, and the destruction of school materials.

With respect **to the security forces**, Human Rights Watch documented the alleged summary executions by state security forces of 14 men, and four deaths in their custody. Almost all of these victims were last seen in the custody of government security forces. We also detail several other cases witnesses believe implicate members of the security forces and which merit further investigation. Most of the alleged abuses occurred between September 2017 and February 2018.

Specifically, the report presents findings on the following alleged violations:

- The alleged killing of seven of over 25 men detained on or around December 27 during a military operation in Damba. They were allegedly summarily executed the next morning after having spent one night in a security force camp. An eighth victim later died of gunshot wounds.
- The alleged killing by men stationed within the Gendarmerie in Djibo of counsellor Moumouni Moussa Dicko, in late September 2017. His body was found the next morning near Djibo.
- The alleged killing by security forces dressed in civilian clothing of Franco-Arab teacher Amadou Dicko, in mid-October 2017. His body was found later the same day near Djibo.
- An alleged killing in March 2018 of a merchant a witness observed being detained by soldiers in the Nassoumbou market. His body was found the next morning.

- The alleged killing in late November 2017, of two traders from around Tem who were detained as they were leaving the Nassoumbou market. Their bodies were found some four kilometers away.
- The alleged killing of a man detained in November 2017 by soldiers on patrol near Bourou; his body was found one week later.
- The deaths in detention of two men detained by the police and army near Baraboulé in late January 2018.

Most witnesses were unable to identify the individual security force members, commanders or particular units involved in the violations described in the report, with most simply describing the alleged perpetrators as “soldiers” or “gendarmes.”

However, some witnesses, community members and security sources said they believed the alleged perpetrators were members of the Burkina Faso Army, the National Gendarmerie, the Combined Anti-Terrorist Forces (GFAT) and the Special Intervention Unit of the National Gendarmerie (USIGN), and to a lesser extent, the National Police.

Witnesses clearly describe those involved in most of the incidents documented by Human Rights Watch as dressing in military uniform, driving in state vehicles known to be used by the security forces and, in a few cases, being detained by soldiers manning checkpoints or being detained within well-known bases. Some of the alleged perpetrators involved a few security force members while others took place in the context of large operations involving numerous vehicles filled with security force personnel.

Community leaders also complained of numerous instances in which the security forces appeared to randomly detain men *en masse* who happened to be in the vicinity of incursions, attacks or ambushes by armed Islamist groups.

Human Rights Watch documented six such mass arrests during which numerous men were severely mistreated in custody and four men died, including the two men from Baraboulé mentioned above, allegedly as a result of severe beatings. Health workers described treating men for cuts, bruises, hematomas and gashes sustained in detention.

Those interviewed consistently described being caught between Islamists’ threats to execute those who collaborated with the state, and the security forces, who expected them to provide intelligence about the presence of armed groups and meted out collective punishment, including mistreatment and arbitrary detention, when they didn’t.

With respect to justice, victims of violence by both the armed Islamists and security forces complained about the slow pace, or complete lack, of investigations into human rights cases since 2016. They also complained about what they perceived to be a partial response to abuses by the authorities. They said killings and abuses by armed Islamists almost always triggered an investigation and, often arrests, while alleged abuses by security force personnel were rarely, if ever, investigated by the security forces or the judiciary.

The report includes several recommendations, including to **the Government of Burkina Faso** to:

- Ensure that everyone taken into custody by government security forces is treated humanely, is promptly brought before a judicial authority to ensure the legality of their detention, and is able to contact their families.
- During any operations involving military personnel, ensure the inclusion of military police – or those exercising the provost marshal function – mandated to monitor and respond to any abuse.
- Investigate and prosecute, in accordance with international fair trial standards, members of the security forces responsible for serious human rights violations, regardless of position or rank, including commanding officers.
- Ensure all persons accused of criminal offenses have access to adequate legal representation regardless of their means, and that they have access to prompt and fair trials as required under international law.

It recommends the National Human Rights Commission of Burkina Faso to conduct impartial, public investigations into alleged human rights abuses by security force personnel and armed Islamist groups.

It recommends the **armed Islamist groups** to cease all extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and other serious human rights abuses including against the education sector.

It urges Burkina Faso's **international partners** to publicly and privately call upon the government to conduct prompt, credible investigations into allegations of abuses by the Burkina Faso security forces.

We will send you our full report as soon as it is published. And, as noted above, we would welcome a response from you to include in our communique. Don't hesitate to contact me at the contacts listed below. Thank you.



Corinne DUFKA

Directrice adjointe, Division Afrique

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Appendix II:

Response from Ministry of Defense and Former Combatants of Burkina Faso

MINISTRE DE LA DEFENSE NATIONALE
ET DES ANCIENS COMBATTANTS
CABINET



BURKINA FASO
Unité - Progrès - Justice

E- - - 0487
N° 2018-...../MDNAC/CAB

Ouagadougou, le 15 MAI 2018

CONFIDENTIEL

Le Ministre

A

Madame Corinne Dufka
Directrice adjointe, Division
Afrique Human Rights Watch
-New York-

Objet : Publication d'un rapport sur de présumées violations de droits humains dans le nord du Burkina Faso.

Références : V/L S/N en date du 09 mai 2018.

Comme suite à votre lettre ci-dessus citée en références et relative à l'objet susmentionné, j'ai l'honneur et le plaisir de vous faire parvenir les éléments d'informations ci-dessous qui reflètent les vues du gouvernement du Burkina Faso :

1. Le gouvernement du Burkina Faso tient d'abord à réaffirmer son attachement au respect des droits humains et son souci à les faire respecter par ses agents, particulièrement les personnels des Forces de Défense et de Sécurité au cours des différentes missions de sécurisation ou des opérations de soutien à la paix ;
2. Il saisit l'occasion pour vous remercier des rencontres d'échanges que vous avez eus courant mois de mars 2018 avec les ministères en charge de la Défense et de la Justice ;

3. Pour ce qui est des efforts engagés pour la promotion des droits humains, il rappelle que des modules de droit international humanitaire sont enseignés dans toutes les écoles et centres de formation des Forces Armées Nationales. Par ailleurs, avant leur déploiement sur les théâtres d'opération des modules spécifiques sur le respect des droits humains en opération sont dispensés aux éléments devant être projetés ;
4. En ce qui concerne les opérations de sécurisation actuellement en cours au Nord de notre pays contre la menace terroriste, des allégations d'exaction contre les populations civiles ont été portées à la connaissance du gouvernement. Elles ont donné lieu à la prise de mesures immédiates. Ainsi, un responsable d'opérations dans le secteur de Banh a été relevé de ses fonctions à titre conservatoire en attendant la suite de l'enquête ordonnée par le commandement militaire. Cette enquête qui se situe à deux niveaux (disciplinaire et pénal) a déjà abouti à une sanction disciplinaire de quarante-cinq (45) jours d'arrêt de rigueur entièrement purgés par l'Officier mis en cause. Le dossier pénal ouvert devant le tribunal militaire de Ouagadougou (TMO) suit son cours. Le parquet du TMO a saisi en date du 07 décembre 2017 par réquisitoire introductif n° 046/2017 le juge d'instruction du cabinet n° 3 ;
5. Le gouvernement souscrit entièrement aux recommandations formulées dans votre lettre et s'engage à les mettre en œuvre. En particulier, il s'engage à diligenter des enquêtes sur tous les cas d'exaction cités qui n'avaient pas auparavant été portés à sa connaissance ;
6. Le gouvernement s'engage à vous tenir informée des suites des enquêtes en cours ou à venir et vous réaffirme son entière disponibilité à coopérer dans le cadre du nécessaire respect des droits humains dans les opérations de sécurisation.

7. Afin d'assurer une fluidité des informations entre votre Organisation et mon Département, il me plaît de vous rappeler que nous avons désigné comme votre point focal le Directeur des Renseignements Militaires, avec lequel je vous exhorte à échanger toute information relative à des violations de droits humains dont vous aurez connaissance, pour nous permettre de prendre au plus tôt les mesures correctives qui s'imposent. Veuillez agréer, chère madame, l'expression de ma parfaite considération.



Jean Claude BOUDA
Commandeur de l'Ordre National

“By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists”

Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso

Since 2016, armed Islamist groups have dramatically increased their presence in Burkina Faso, where they have attacked government institutions, clashed with security forces, executed suspected collaborators, and intimidated teachers. In response to the growing threat, Burkinabé security forces have conducted counterterrorism operations in 2017 and 2018 that have resulted in numerous alleged abuses including extrajudicial killings, abuse of suspects in custody, and arbitrary arrests. The violence, concentrated in the northern Sahel region and the capital, Ouagadougou, has claimed scores of lives. This report, *“By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists,”* contains disturbing testimony of the abuses and describes how communities feel trapped between often-abusive actors on both sides. It recommends that the government open investigations into incidents of alleged human rights violations and take measures to prevent further abuses. It further urges Burkina Faso’s international partners to call upon the government to conduct prompt and credible investigations.



People from villages around the region converge on the town of Djibo in northern Burkina Faso every Wednesday on market day.

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