

[Mali | Groundbreaking new law strengthens legal protection of human rights defenders](#)

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The Malian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (COMADDH), the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the West African Human Rights Defenders Network (WAHRDN) and Front Line Defenders welcome the enactment by the President of the Republic of Mali of the national law on human rights defenders adopted by the parliament on 13 December 2017.

'In adopting this law, which was initiated by civil society, Mali recognises the role that we play as human rights defenders in the development of the country and our need for protection. It's a law of vital importance for us,' says Mahamar Mohamed El Moctar, President of COMADDH.

By enacting this law, Mali becomes the third African country to strengthen its legal system protecting human rights defenders, following Côte d'Ivoire in June 2014 and Burkina Faso in June 2017.

Article 2 of the law implements a broad definition of human rights defenders as enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. It contains provisions intended to foster an environment conducive to the work of human rights defenders in Mali. Notable provisions include the inviolability of homes and offices of human rights defenders (Article 6), the engagement without restriction of human rights defenders with international bodies for the protection of human rights (Article 7), and the right to receive funding to carry out their activities (Article 8). It should also be noted that, in Article 16, the law sets out the principle of non-refoulement of any human rights defender to a country where they risk torture and inhuman and degrading treatment.

The NGOs welcome the adoption of a text inspired largely by the [Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#) and through which parliamentarians have taken account of amendments suggested by civil society.

Thanks to the advocacy of COMADDH, ISHR and Front Line Defenders, as well as other Malian human rights organisations, the Malian parliament has strengthened the bill submitted by the government by including specific protection for women human rights defenders (Article 18) and human rights defenders with disabilities (Article 19).

'Women human rights defenders face particular challenges which require specific legal provisions to guarantee their protection from all forms of violence and discrimination as well as a safe working environment. The inclusion of this provision increases the protection afforded to them,' stated Olivia Tchamba,

Protection Coordinator for West and Central Africa at Front Line Defenders.

'In welcoming this positive development, we invite the Malian government to use this opportunity of the implementation decree provided for in Article 20 to put in place an efficient and effective protection mechanism. This mechanism should have political support from the State and have the necessary resources for its functions. This mechanism is important to ensure the effective implementation of the law,' added Clément Voule, Advocacy Director for Africa at ISHR.

The four organisations who have signed this statement encourage the Malian authorities to continue their work to guarantee the best possible protection to human rights defenders in order to ensure the swift and effective implementation of the new law. To this end, they reiterate their willingness and availability to accompany the authorities through this process.

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