

# Conflict in Mali loses out to focus on progress made in the country

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Against the background of the ongoing conflict in the country, Mali appeared before UN member States for a review of its human rights record as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process. Mr Malick Coulibaly, Minister of Justice, representing the State, spoke of the 'negative impact' that the crisis has had on the human rights situation in the country. He called for assistance from the international community to maintain what he described as 'the progress' already made in this area. The review took place on 22 January in Geneva.

Many States commended Mali for submitting its national report and attending its review despite the continuing conflict in the country. However, as some States noted, the report does not reflect the seriousness of the situation in the country, for example, it does not mention torture or enforced disappearances.

## **Focus on positive steps**

In his presentation of the report Mr Coulibaly also chose to focus on the positive steps that the country had taken despite the on-going crisis. He outlined that the drafting of the national report was the result of the close cooperation between Government and various actors of civil society. He further noted that since the first review of Mali under the UPR the National Human Rights Commission has been created by a decree of 2009, the Ombudsman has been granted new missions to improve the rule of law, governance, human rights and the regulation of conflicts. A new ministry had been created for the Promotion of the Family, Women and Children, with the aim of upholding the rights of these groups. Further, States too paid attention to the positive achievements in the country, including, among others, the adoption of the personal and family code aimed at improving the situation of women and children, the national plan of action for elimination of child labour, awareness raising campaigns on female genital mutilation, improvement in the health and education systems, increased participation of women in public life, and the ratification of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Convention on Enforced Disappearances*.

## **Ongoing conflict**

Most States did also note the ongoing crisis and violence committed by rebels and armed groups in the northern part of Mali. In that respect, Norway and France agreed that perpetrators must be brought to justice and welcomed the decision by the International Criminal Court to investigate the crimes. Mali was also called on to ensure that all measures have been taken to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers.

## **Other recommendations**

Furthermore, the Working Group stressed the importance of taking legislative measures aimed at putting an end to female genital mutilation and other harmful traditional practices, as well as to protect women and girls against sexual violence. The Government of Mali should ensure freedom of religion in the entire country and protection of religious and cultural sites, and should undertake all measures to protect freedom of expression and prevent attacks on journalists. The majority of States also strongly recommended that Mali should ratify the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In his final remark Mr Coulibaly outlined that Mali has not forgotten about human rights and that the Government has demonstrated its commitment by respecting human rights standards and promoting peace and democracy.

Mali received a total of 176 recommendations, of which it accepted 85 plus 12 saying that it considered that 85 of these recommendations were in fact already implemented or in the process of being implemented. These latter recommendations included those relating to plans to hold free, fair, and credible elections, to ensure that international human rights standards are observed by the Malian Armed Forces including ban on torture and ill-treatment, and protect women against all forms of sexual violence. Mali will give its position on the remaining 26 recommendations no later than the 23rd session of the Human Rights Council, which is

scheduled in Geneva from 27 May to 14 June 2013.

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