

Immediate

Note to the Secretary-General

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Mali/MINUSMA: recent ceasefire violations

21/08/15

1. This note is to draw your attention to recent ceasefire violations in northern Mali which could endanger the peace process and which have led to tensions between the Government of Mali and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In due course, your intervention with key players to help de-escalate tensions may be required.

Background

2. Over the past weeks, the *Groupe d'autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés* (GATIA), a member of the Platform coalition of armed groups with close links to the Malian Government, established forward positions on the Tabankort-Anéfis axis (Gao and Kidal regions). Following clashes with the *Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad* (CMA) in several areas, on 17 August the town of Anéfis shifted from the CMA to GATIA control. Under the ceasefire agreements, these strategically important areas on the road to Algeria are under CMA control. The forward movement of the GATIA was therefore in violation of the ceasefire.

3. These events constituted the first major breaches of the ceasefire since the signing of the Peace Agreement in June, and as such could jeopardize the peace process. While the situation has been calm over the last 48 hours, it remains volatile. Further northern advances by GATIA or a CMA counter-attack in Anéfis or elsewhere remain real – and dangerous – possibilities.

Response to the situation by MINUSMA, the Government and the Mediation

4. Initially, MINUSMA deployed troops and helicopters to Anéfis and dispatched a joint verification mission to assess the situation. The CMA refused to partake in the exercise. To protect civilians from what was assessed to be a likely advance on the town of Kidal by the GATIA, MINUSMA established a "security belt" around Kidal town in line with its mandate. This echoed similar actions taken in previous instances of ceasefire violations, for example in Ménaka in May 2015. This measure was not welcome by the parties or the Government, for different reasons. The CMA criticised the measure as an endorsement of the new status quo in Anéfis preventing them from "settling the score" with GATIA, while the Platform, echoing the Government, denounced it as a biased measure taken unilaterally by MINUSMA to unfairly protect CMA territory.

5. Politically, the ceasefire violations were unequivocally condemned by MINUSMA, the Government of Mali, the Algeria-led international Mediation, and other members of the international community. It should be noted that the Mediation explicitly called for a return by all parties to the positions held at the time of the signature of the Peace Agreement.

6. MINUSMA has engaged the political and military leadership on both sides since the

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onset of the clashes to de-escalate tensions. While the political bodies established by the Peace Agreement have yet to be convened, the international members of the Mediation Team have been engaging the parties. At this stage, the Platform appears steadfast in its refusal to pull back from Anéfis. The Coordination has indicated its willingness to refrain from counter-attacking while the Mediation discusses with the Platform, but it is unclear how long it is willing to wait.

7. On 19 August, I briefed the Security Council on the situation and on the measures taken by MINUSMA. In a media statement following the session, the Council expressed support for the Mission's efforts to protect civilians and called on the parties to cease hostilities and restore the status quo ante. I also spoke to Algerian Foreign Affairs Minister Lamamra, impressing the need to convene the CSA soonest, to bring all parties around the table and address the situation.

Way forward

8. As time passes, attention is shifting from responsibility over the initial breaches of the ceasefire to the status of Anéfis. The CMA appears unlikely to accept any other outcome than regaining control over Anéfis, while the GATIA and Platform, possibly with the acquiescence of some in the Malian Government, appear intent on maintaining control over the areas gained through the breaches of the ceasefire violation. This is the first test for the viability of the Peace Agreement and its implementation architecture. The next few days, and the success of the political initiative to de-escalate tensions, will determine whether fighting will resume and provide an indication of the sustainability of the Peace Agreement itself.

9. The Mission's standing vis-à-vis Malian counterparts is also at stake, as evidenced by the reactions to the "security belt". I am especially concerned about the possibility of some of the parties mobilizing communities in protest against MINUSMA, as was the case in previous instances. For the moment, we have advised the Mission to maintain its robust operational posture in the north, continue to prioritise political efforts and to increase media engagements to explain its actions. We have also asked Council members to express support for MINUSMA's posture and actions.

10. Relevant stakeholders, and particularly the Malian Government, should continue impressing on the parties the necessity to abide by the Peace Agreement. In this regard, we may seek your support in reaching out to key interlocutors at the highest level.


Hervé Ladsous
21 August 2015

Cc: Mr. Feltman
Mr. Khare