

Catherine Ashton
High Representative of the Union
for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy
Vice President of the European Commission

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



European Institutions Office

Brussels, 16 January

Our Ref: B1396

Dear Baroness Ashton,

EU: HELP ENSURE THAT CIVILIANS ARE PROTECTED IN MALI

At this critical moment in the conflict in Mali, Amnesty International urges the EU to help ensure that protection for civilians receives the highest priority. We ask that during and following the extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council this week, the EU urge all parties to do their utmost to prevent civilian casualties.

We have a number of specific concerns. As members of armed Islamist groups are inter-mingled with the population in Northern Mali, we are concerned that there may be unlawful and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The French soldiers, Malian army, and other African forces involved in this intervention must take all the necessary measures to avoid any civilian casualties. The Malian army has a record of such attacks, as documented in our May 2012 report, [Mali: Five months of crisis: Armed rebellion and military coup](#). Unintended civilian casualties might also result from inaccurate bombing.

Amnesty International has documented the use of child soldiers by Islamist groups in this conflict. We believe that some have been wounded and possibly killed in the fighting. Government-supported militias have also recruited child soldiers, as documented in our September 2012 report, [Mali: Civilians bear the brunt of the conflict](#).

We are concerned that the Malian army might resort to reprisals against real or perceived civilian supporters of armed opposition groups in the territories that would come back under their control. Malian soldiers have in the past been responsible for extra-judicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, enforced disappearance, and torture. We are also concerned that the African intervention force, which is to deploy ahead of schedule, will include contributions from countries whose security forces have a record of human rights violations.

Armed Islamist groups have been responsible for severe human rights abuses during their reign in Northern Mali. Our September 2012 report documents amputations and other corporal punishments, sexual violence, daily harassment aimed at imposing new moral codes, and extra-judicial executions. Amnesty International is calling on them not to use child soldiers and refrain from targeting the civilian population and using them as human shields.

We urge the EU to:

- Call for the rapid deployment of human rights monitors to deter and document human rights violations
- Call on France and the Malian armed forces to give as much warning as possible to civilians before carrying out attacks and avoid indiscriminate shelling and bombing at all costs
- Call on relevant parties to ensure that external armed forces entering the conflict are properly trained and do not add to human rights violations
- In line with the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, call on all parties to cease recruiting and using child soldiers

Yours sincerely,

Dr Nicolas J Beger
Director

CC

Nicholas Westcott, European External Action Service, Managing Director for Africa

Véronique Arnault, European External Action Service, Director for Human Rights and Democracy

Peteris Ustubs, European External Action Service, Director for West and Central Africa

Sean Doyle, European External Action Service, Head of Division for West Africa

Richard Zink, EU Ambassador to Mali

Fiona Lunny, Chair of the Council Working Party on Africa