



PEACE IN MALI REQUIRES A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

The situation in Mali is highly fragile. The peace agreement partially signed on 15 May does not present a viable solution to the escalating crisis. Inclusion, dialogue, thorough implementation and efficient monitoring are needed.

The crisis in Mali developed following a coup in 2012. Over the past three years an increasing number of deadly attacks on government forces, humanitarian workers and UN peacekeepers have taken place. Since 2013 Denmark has supported the UN peacekeeping operation called MINUSMA. On 15 May 2015, a peace ceremony was held in the capital Bamako celebrating a potential step towards ending three years of violent conflict, but there is little reason for optimism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Peacebuilding efforts in Mali require

- Inclusion of all groups of the North instead of the current limited focus on North/South divisions and Tuareg separatism.
- Eradicating the incentives for engaging in criminal activities currently sustaining the armed groups in the North.
- Re-establishing a non-biased inclusive national dialogue about the future and local reconciliation processes to do justice to the past.
- Ensuring efficient implementation and external monitoring of all aspects of the peace agreement.

The government and the pro-government rebels have signed the 21 pages agreement, but the main coalition of northern groups, CMA, requested more time to sign. The most contentious issue concerns the political status of three northern regions, called Azawad by CMA. The main elements of the agreement are:

- Increased decentralization through the establishment of regional assemblies with greater administrative and judicial powers in regional matters.
- The disarmament of the rebel groups and their reinsertion into national security forces. In the northern regions, the security forces will be composed mainly by people originating from that area.
- A plan for privileged development of the three main northern regions.

Sustainability of the agreement

Four major points in particular hamper the sustainability of the peace agreement: Firstly, the signing parties constitute coalitions of rebel groups, who by no means represent the diverse populations living in the northern regions. This could threaten the long term legitimacy of the agreement.

Secondly, the agreement focuses mainly on the Tuareg separatist groups who have continuously revolted against the Malian state since independence in 1960. The agreement excludes jihadist groups, who have no incentives for peace and whose illicit economic activities benefit from the current chaos, sometimes in cooperation with politicians and national security actors. Furthermore, former members of jihadist groups have joined separatists groups and vice versa.

Thirdly, the solution of increased decentralization fails to recognize the extent to which corruption and nepotism within the Malian state has contributed to the crisis. Decentralization was already presented as

part of a solution to the Tuareg rebellion in the 1990s, but implementation was postponed, and the government failed to establish accountable institutions at the local level. More decentralization may enhance the already intense competition over authority among local and national elites and as such further exclude common citizens.

Finally, many doubt that a viable solution can be found with external actors' continuous interference and pressure for the implementation of the peace deal. Malians are critical of the Danish supported UN peacekeeping operation, MINUSMA, who have been accused from all sides of not being neutral. In order to secure a lasting peace, other steps need to be taken. The longer the waiting, the more difficult the insertion of state institutions in the North will be, and in the absence of order, jihadist groups will strive to take control.

Ways forward

The representativeness of the current parties is highly questionable and other groups need to be involved in the peace process. A more comprehensive approach based on inclusion of the major actors thriving on the crisis - both jihadists and small gangs - is required to secure stability. Removing the incentives for engaging in illicit economic activities by creating realistic livelihood strategies, particularly for the youth, must be part of the long term peacebuilding process.

So far, the national dialogue and reconciliation process has been hampered by political disagreements while large parts of the national population have been left out. In addition to transitional justice, dialogue should engage the question of the national distribution of wealth and incomes, which is central to the claims and frustrations of most armed groups. Learning from the failures of past peace agreements, it is crucial to ensure political will, sufficient financial resources for fast and efficient implementation and external monitoring of the peace agreement including transparency of anticipated development projects.

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Cover photo: A MINUSMA peacekeeper stands guard at the entrance to a polling station in Kidal, Mali, during the presidential election in 2013.
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