BURKINA FASO, MALI: A BLOODY START TO THE NEW YEAR

Some 37 Fulani people were killed on 1 January 2019 in an armed raid on the Mopti region village Koulogon in central Mali. According to a government statement, the attackers were “armed men dressed like traditional Dozo hunters.” Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita visited the graves of the victims. The government donated food and money to help the victims’ families rebuild the village and encourage them to stay. “We have come to tell you the Malian state is with you. We offer the condolences of the nation and assure you this crime will not go unpunished,” Keita said. The government launched an investigation and an independent UN human rights report is expected to shed light on the tragic event. A second inter-community clash took place on the New Year’s Day in the village of Yirgou in central-northern Burkina Faso. Following an armed attack by terrorists, Burkinabé villagers attacked a nearby camp of nomadic Fulani herders, accusing them of being the militants’ accomplices. According to the government’s official record, 49 people were killed. President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré presented his condolences and told the villagers that they have the government’s full support to ensure their safety. Several thousand Burkinabé gathered on 12 January in Ouagadougou at a silent protest march against impunity and the stigmatisation of communities. “It doesn’t matter whether we are Mossi, Bobo, Gourounsi, Fulani, Senoufo, Gourmatche, etc. We are first of all Burkinabé people and we have to preserve the Faso and defend it,” read one protestor’s sign. Hassane Barry, president of the newly-created Collective against Impunity and Stigmatisation of Communities (CCISC), underscored that the killings in Yirgou are not an “ethnic problem”, but were simply the criminal act of some individuals. “Burkina Faso has no ethnicities. Burkina Faso has a Burkinabé people,” he declared. On 31 December, the government of Burkina Faso declared a state of emergency in 14 of its 45 provinces. Within the past three years, terrorist attacks have caused more than 270 fatalities in the country, and the capital city Ouagadougou has been attacked three times. About 800 schools have been closed. The overall situation in the Sahel remains highly unstable, despite a strong military presence.
UEMOA CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

The official celebration ceremony took place on 10 January in the capital city of Burkina Faso at the International Conference Centre of Ouaga 2000. The group welcomed the presence of President Alassane Dramane Ouattara of Côte d’Ivoire, the current chair of the UEMOA’s Heads of State and Governments Conference. Burkina Faso’s President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré also welcomed the Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau and many other high-level officials. The event’s theme was “Achieving free movement of goods and people together.” A film with testimonies about UEMOA’s activities over the past 25 years was broadcast by the national TV stations of the eight member countries. In his statement, President Ouattara applauded the Union’s great achievements in furthering regional integration. However, many challenges remain. President Ouattara highlighted the low rate of intra-community trade (passing from 9.6% in 1996 to 16.1% in 2018); the large number of border controls, delays and illegal imposed levies; the distortion of competition; and difficulties of some companies in gaining access to markets within the union. At the end of the ceremony, the two presidents inaugurated the new UEMOA administrative complex, located in Ouaga 2000.

NIGER, EU START WORK ON ZINDER-TANOUT ROAD

Niger is taking a step forward in accomplishing the dream of a trans-Saharan highway that will link six countries of the Sahel and Maghreb (Algeria, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia). On 13 January, Niger’s President Mahamadou Issoufou, together with Denisa-Elena Lonette, ambassador of the EU Delegation, kicked off the rehabilitation of the 138-km Zinder-Tanout road. “The project is indeed of crucial importance for Niger, not only to facilitate local trade but also to contribute to filling an important gap in the major trans-Saharan axis between Lagos and Algiers. This means connecting six countries across 9 600 km,” stated the EU delegation in Niger. According to government sources, the project will cost FCPA 30 billion (EUR 46 million). The European Union is helping to fund the project. Road infrastructure is a key part of the EU’s co-operation with Niger. The EU has supported infrastructure development worth FCPA 210 billion (EUR 325 million) over the past decade.

GUINEA: CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE NEW POLYGAMY LAW

Guinean deputies passed a new civil code on 29 December 2018 to modernise its laws, but the text sparked controversy as it formally legalises polygamy. Guinea’s president is now trying to stop the new code. President Alpha Condé said, “How can Guinea adopt monogamy in 1960 and intend to legalise polygamy in 2018?” He refused to promulgate the new code and requested, in a letter on 4 January, that the parliament review the measure a second time. Associations of women are also mobilising and demanding the withdrawal of Articles 281 and 282, saying that the articles contradict Article 8, which recognises the equal rights of men and women. Deputies could still go ahead and approve the new code if they manage to gather an absolute majority by 31 January. Many deputies are supporting the new law, because they are themselves in polygamous relationships. So far, polygamy has been prohibited for civil marriages in Guinea. However, it is widely practised in religious marriages. Polygamy is a centuries-old practice in Africa and is broadly accepted in nearly half of African countries.
MUST READ

READY TO HELP? IMPROVING RESILIENCE OF INTEGRATION SYSTEMS FOR REFUGEES AND OTHER VULNERABLE MIGRANTS

This OECD report looks at ways to improve the resilience of systems to deal with the unexpected arrival of large inflows of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. The world’s refugee population increased to a record high of 19.9 million people by mid-2018. European countries received four million asylum applications between 2014-17, three times as many as during the previous four-year period. However, for European countries as a whole, the impact of the refugee inflow is estimated to be small. The report tackles issues of anticipation, monitoring and reacting, by examining the role of early warning mechanisms and the challenge of improving information. It recommends that countries increase their co-operation and share information to enable them to deal more effectively and quickly with inflows of humanitarian migrants.

FOCUS ON AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES IN MALI

This eight-page summary by Inter-Réseaux draws attention to the relative success of Mali’s agricultural policies and investments. Mali is one of a handful of African countries that have devoted 10% of their public resources to the agricultural sector in the last decade, in accordance with the Maputo Declaration. It has also set up some social protection programmes since 2002. However, following the socio-political crisis in 2012, a large chunk of agricultural investments has been diverted to the security sector. Many social protection programmes rely heavily on external-funds and lack links with initiatives that support family farming. Mali now aims to develop a more ambitious social protection policy that includes improved planning, better co-ordination and more domestic financial resources.

OPINION

A QUIET REVOLUTION: MORE WOMEN SEEK DIVORCES IN CONSERVATIVE WEST AFRICA

The number of women seeking divorces is increasing overall in West Africa. “Frustrated by their husbands’ inability to earn a living, and in a society where basic views on relationships have changed, women are asserting more control over their marriages,” explains Dionne Searcey, West Africa bureau chief for The New York Times. Her article offers a series of testimonies from women’s divorce cases. While divorce does not always have a positive outcome, it is a sign that women know their rights and are demanding respect and happiness in their marriages. Child and forced marriages are also declining, thanks to the efforts of child protection and women’s associations, which push communities to change their attitudes about these practices.

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE SAHEL?

In this interview by Défis humanitaires, Jean-Marc Châtaigner, ambassador and France’s special envoy for the Sahel, takes stock of the security situation in the Sahel and analyses the key challenges facing the region. This interview provides a detailed explanation of the French government’s 3D concept - diplomacy, defense and development - which Châtaigner makes 4D by adding “droit” or law and advocating for a rights-based approach. Châtaigner also takes stock of the progress made in the implementation of the Sahel Alliance, a partnership of donors active in the Sahel. Launched in July 2017, the Sahel Alliance now counts 12 members. They have pledged to spend EUR 9 billion on 600 projects in five Sahelian countries over the next four years. “I believe we are finally making the connection between humanitarian and development approaches,” Châtaigner states. Needs are now identified by target area and no longer solely defined by a project approach. This should make interventions much more efficient. “Among the pledges made in Nouakchott, some will have to be translated very quickly into projects on the ground, in particular the EUR 227 million of the emergency development programmes; otherwise, we will have lost a decisive battle”, Châtaigner concludes.
It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing of René Kouassi in early January 2019. Kouassi, an economics professor from Côte d’Ivoire, was the director of economic affairs at the African Union Commission, a post he occupied since 2003. He was a strong defender of Africa’s regional integration. In 2018, Kouassi initiated the Africa’s Development Dynamics series, the new joint flagship publication of the African Union Commission and the OECD Development Centre. For more than a decade, Kouassi was in charge of overseeing the work of four AU divisions, namely economic policy and research, private sector development, statistics, and regional integration and co-operation. Kouassi started his academic career at the University of Abidjan in 1985, where he worked as a lecturer and researcher for more than a decade. Kouassi obtained a post-graduate diploma (DEA) in economics from the University of Clermont-Ferrand in France (1985) and a PhD in development economics from the University of Versailles (1995).

MAPS & FACTS

Polygamy remains common and mostly legal in West Africa

Polygamy has declined in the last decade but remains common in West Africa. For example, 33% of women in Nigeria reported that their husbands have more than one wife (Demographic and Health Survey, 2013). This very old practice is essentially recognised under customary law and/or religious practices. In most West African countries, polygamy is also recognised and regulated by the civil law that allows a man to marry up to four women under certain conditions, including the financial capacity to support multiple wives and families. In practice, a polygamous union is in most cases limited to two women per couple. Six West African countries have civil codes that formally prohibit polygamy (Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria) but legal restrictions are rarely enforced. Other countries such as Burkina Faso or Togo recognise polygamous unions under modern civil law, but allow couples or men (Chad, Mali and Senegal) to choose between a monogamous or polygamous union. In some countries such as Mauritania, a man is only allowed to marry a new woman with the consent of his existing spouse/s. In Nigeria, multiple marital regimes operate in parallel. While civil law formally prohibits polygamy, the 12 northern states that are governed under Islamic Sharia law recognise polygamous marriages. If the vote on the new civil code is confirmed, Guinea will become the latest African country to legalise polygamy (following Kenya in 2014). The legal status of a married woman can help protect her and allow her access to certain rights. However, polygynous marriage contravenes a woman’s right to equality with men. Traditionally more prevalent in rural areas, polygamy has also adapted to the urban and educated environment.

**WHO’S WHO: RENÉ N’GUETTIA KOUASSI, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

![René N’guettia Kouassi](image)

Kouassi’s legacy is a testament to his dedication to the cause of African integration and development.