



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX June 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fourth session

June–July 2020 (TBC)

Agenda item 3

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Terrorism leads to human rights crisis in Burkina Faso

The security situation in northern Burkina Faso is desperate. The escalating violence has been forcing 850,000 people to flee their homes and to abandon their villages. Attacks by extremists linked to Islamic State and al-Qaida terror groups and violence by traffickers and criminal gangs are adding to the instability of the West African state. Frequent militant attacks launched against churches, mosques, schools and refugee camps created fear and a wave of panic among the civilian population. Deliberately targeting worshippers, internal displaced people, farmers, mining staff and traders are war crimes. Vast areas of northern Burkina Faso are lacking access for aid agencies due to insecurity. Nearly 600 security incidents provoking the violent death of 2.000 people have been registered in the year 2019. Since January 2020 the insecurity has worsened. Testimonies of survivors are indicating that the extremists are targeting especially men and young boys. They have been kidnapped and extralegally shot dead by armed fighters.

As violence and forced displacement continues across northern Burkina Faso, the security forces have increased their efforts to ensure a better protection of the civilian population. The lack of state authority, police, soldiers, judges and presence of state representatives contributes very much to insecurity in the region. Therefore, the culprits of attacks rarely are identified or brought to justice, creating suspicion among the various ethnic and religious groups while forcing the security apparatus to rely on self-defense militias (known as Koglweogo).

This security strategy is extremely dangerous because the vigilantes will exacerbate ethnic tensions with the marginalized Fulani, who often are accused of joining or harbouring the extremists and have been targeted by the army and local self-defense militias as a result. Dozens of non-armed Fulani villagers have been murdered in reprisal attacks by Koglweogo in spring 2020. This violence documents that subcontracting militias to fight insurgents is a disastrous approach encouraging violence by non-state actors and inciting the uncontrolled distribution of arms, which will not contribute to more peace. Instead it is the best way to provoke more bloodshed and abuses by armed fighters. The experience in many conflict areas in Africa has shown in the last years the negative impact of armed non-state actors on conflict resolution.

Generally, we are supportive to all efforts of the Government of Burkina Faso to protect basic human rights of the civilian population by enhancing the security presence. But the army's efforts to beat back the militant extremists have been marred by accusations of widespread human rights abuses. In the year 2019, at least the cases of 60 people have been documented who were executed without trial. Unfortunately, this human rights crisis didn't improve in the year 2020. Between January and mid-May 2020, at least 43 presumed extremist fighters were shot in custody of security forces.

On April 9, the Burkinabe security forces allegedly executed 31 incarcerated former fighters of insurgent groups following a counter-terrorism operation in Djibo. According to several witnesses, the fighters had been arrested by the security forces a few hours before. All arrested people were of Fulani descent.

On May 13, another incident has raised public attention and intense discussion in Burkina Faso. Some 24 people were arrested for "suspected acts of terrorism" at Tanwalbougou in the eastern part of the country. Twelve of the arrested men later were found dead in their cells, the local prosecutor announced on May 13. Relatives of the disappeared people declared that bullet wounds at the head indicated that the 12 men were executed in the same systematic manner. Relatives, lawyers and human rights organizations urged the Government to launch an independent inquiry in the cruel death of the Fulani in state custody. Both incidents might be classified as summary and extralegal executions and war crimes.

The new ethnic dimension of the anti-terrorism campaign in Burkina Faso bares the potential to increase ethnic tensions in the country, especially regarding the Fulani community. Anti-terrorist activities should respect basic human rights and international human rights conventions. Otherwise the struggle against insecurity and extremist militants will fail.

Society for Threatened Peoples therefore calls upon the UN Human Rights Council to:

- call on the Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Burkina Faso to accept an independent international inquiry in the incidents and to publish the results of the research in outmost transparency,
- insist that all soldiers or militia fighters responsible for extralegal executions should be brought to justice; Impunity for war crimes immediately has to stop,
- To call on the Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Burkina Faso to stop using self-defense militias to ensure the protection of the civilian population.

