**NAVI PILLAY CALLS FOR MAJOR EFFORT TO HALT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN MALI**

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said on Thursday that she was alarmed by continuing reports of serious human rights violations against the population of Mali, especially in rebel-held northern areas, and called for urgent national and international action to bring an end to the political instability that has been fuelling the violence.

“Reports from the north of the country suggest that civilians have been killed, robbed, raped and forced to flee,” Ms. Pillay said. “It is difficult at this point to be sure of the scale of the human rights violations taking place, but in addition to preying on individuals, a variety of different rebel groups have been accused of looting private and public property, including hospitals and health care facilities.”

Ms. Pillay said she was concerned that the longer the instability continued, the more the human rights situation appeared to be deteriorating, with thousands of people already fleeing the northern region to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

“Reports also suggest that tensions between different ethnic groups are being stirred up, increasing the risk of sectarian violence,” the United Nations human rights chief said. “In addition it seems that unveiled women have allegedly received threats and intimidation, and there are allegations that non-Muslims in the northern part of the country may have been deliberately targeted and killed by extremist religious groups.”

Ms. Pillay also said that human rights violations, including illegal arrests, poor conditions of detention and attempts to restrict the right to freedom of expression, have been reported in the capital Bamako in the wake of the military takeover on 22 March.

The High Commissioner welcomed recent efforts to restore constitutional order, and in particular today’s planned hand-over of power by the military coup leaders to the National Assembly Speaker who has been designated interim President.

The political situation nevertheless remains extremely tense and fragile, and the High Commissioner urged the coup leaders to fulfil their promise to step aside and called on all forces operating in Mali to respect international humanitarian and human rights law.

She noted that acts of violence targeting civilians may constitute crimes under international law. “Individuals who commit these types of serious crimes must be held accountable. The International Criminal Court was established for the very purpose of investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of such crimes,” she said, noting that Mali is one of the 121 States that have ratified the Rome Statute.

“The urgency of the situation in Mali is exacerbating an already extremely serious humanitarian crisis affecting the whole of the Sahel region, and the country may soon be plunged into a devastating food crisis with a risk of other shortages, including medical supplies, if the insurrections and insecurity persist,” Ms. Pillay said.

The High Commissioner urged a concerted effort from all actors, including national, international and regional organizations, to enable Mali to arrest the unfolding human rights and humanitarian crisis.

*OHCHR Country Page – Mali:* [*http://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africaregion/pages/mlindex.aspx*](http://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africaregion/pages/mlindex.aspx)

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