

## Mali: Training Military staff on IHL and Human Rights

Written with Cynthia Petrich Found in Schirch, Lisa, with Deborah Mancini-Griffoli (editors). *Local Ownership in Security: Case Studies of Peacebuilding Approaches*. The Hague: Alliance for Peacebuilding, GPPAC, Kroc Institute, 2015. Found at [www.humansecuritycoordination.org](http://www.humansecuritycoordination.org)

Historic patterns of distrust between the Malian army and the tribally diverse population following the ending of colonial rule in 1960 contribute to on-going cycles of violence between northern Mali's Tuareg tribal group, Islamist groups, and the Malian military, which led a military coup in April 2012. International assistance to the Malian military focuses primarily on providing weapons and tactical training. Civilians are often caught in the middle of fighting.

### The challenge:

Illiterate military forces that speak different language are fighting non-state armed groups in a context where security forces had previously neglected protection of civilians.

### Theory of change:

Create a basic training on protection of civilians accessible to illiterate soldiers who speak different languages and then integrate training themes into a practice-based scenario.

When the European Union Training Mission in Mali's (EUTM) requested a civilian trainer on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights, the Paris-based civil society organisation Beyond Peace was tasked to carry out initial research on military patterns of abuse. Beyond Peace worked with local and international NGOs, human rights groups, and the Malian Ministry of Defence to identify patterns of military forces abuse. Documented accounts of arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearance, use of torture, sexual violence, attacks on civilians, looting, and attacks on schools indicated a systemic lack of attention to protection of civilians and international law.

The Beyond Peace training on IHL and human rights faced a variety of challenges. Most of the Malian forces were illiterate. Soldiers receiving training did not share a common language, though many knew some French. The design of the military training that they were receiving in parallel to Beyond Peace's course was

cumulative, moving from simple to more difficult manoeuvres. The Beyond Peace training on IHL and human rights was on separate topics (such as distinction, proportionality, or treatment of prisoners) making it difficult to build on topics alongside the military training. And finally, there was only one IHL trainer, compared to 185 military trainers. The IHL trainer had to negotiate with military trainers for time allotment and inclusion of key themes into interactive scenario.

To address these challenges, Beyond Peace developed and delivered a 10 week course for 700 Malian military personnel, all men and mostly illiterate, who were preparing for immediate deployment to conduct policing, area control and counterinsurgency. The training focused on IHL and human rights to address these major incidents and prepare them with "right reflexes" when facing fear, hatred and violence, particularly with civilians. The training was not academic or highly technical. The main ideas of key international legal documents were translated into simpler and more accessible concepts that were then practiced in



Photo 11: Beyond Peace in Mali. Photo Credit: Cynthia Petrich

interactive scenarios. Training on IHL and human rights is about sharing values and changing mind-sets. It can only be achieved if the mission itself believes in these values and is ready to challenge its own mind-set.”<sup>39</sup>

To evaluate this training program, Beyond Peace measured the acquisition of knowledge as well as changes to behaviour after deployment. A pre and post-training questionnaire was given on Week 1 and Week 10. Comparative results illustrated improvement on knowledge of IHL and human rights. In addition, trainers met weekly to reflect on group learning objectives and subjective progress in meeting these. Training exercises were adapted to reflect challenges in meeting learning objectives. In addition, the trainer gathered feedback from partners and observers about violations of IHL and human rights. No major violations were reported after the training, in contrast to the frequent reports of violations before the training. During a refresher course for one of the battalions, soldiers’ anecdotal reports indicated that they had used the IHL and human rights training and that it did change their behaviour in military operations. They indicated their relationship with the local population had improved.



---

<sup>39</sup> Petrih, Cynthia. “Even Wars Have Limits: An IHL Training Manual.” Paris: July 2014. p. 47.