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Mali:

# Appeal by Women of Mali: Say “No!” to the war by proxy

- IV Online magazine - 2013 - IV457 - February 2013 -

Publication date: Saturday 16 February 2013

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**While the two jaws of the Malian trap - the warmongering Western intervention backed by the countries of West Africa, and the reactionary Islamism in the North - have not yet closed, an independent voice, the voice of Malian women, is trying to make heard its refusal of this war by proxy. We publish below their appeal, which is dated November 20, 2012.**

From the dramatic situation in Mali, there emerges a terrible reality which can be verified in other countries in conflict: the instrumentalization of violence against women in order to justify interference and wars whose objective is to grab hold of their countries' wealth. African women must know this and must make it known.

Although the amputation of two-thirds of Mali's territory and the imposition of sharia law on the populations of the occupied regions are humanly unacceptable, the exploitation of this situation, including the fate reserved for women, is morally indefensible and politically intolerable.

We have, as a result, we women of Mali, a historic role to play, here and now, in the defence of our human rights against three forms of fundamentalism: religious through radical Islam; economic through the omnipotence of the market; political through formal, corrupt and corrupting democracy.

We invite all those women and men who, in our country, in Africa and elsewhere, feel concerned by our liberation from these fundamentalisms to join their voices to ours to say “No” to the proxy war that is looming on the horizon. The following arguments justify this refusal.

## **The denial of democracy**

The demand for the deployment of African troops in northern Mali, transmitted by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) to the United Nations, is based on a diagnosis that is deliberately biased and illegitimate. It is not based on any national dialogue worthy of the name, either at the top or at the base. Furthermore, this diagnosis also excludes the heavy moral and political responsibility of nations, those who violated Security Council Resolution 1973 by transforming the protection of the Libyan city of Benghazi into a mandate to overthrow the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi and to kill him. The coalition of the separatists of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and its allies, who defeated a Malian army that was demotivated and disorganized, also owes this military victory to the arsenals that came from the Libyan conflict.

Will the same Security Council approve, in the coming days, the plan of military intervention that African heads of state have approved, pretending in this way to correct the consequences of an unjust war by an equally unjust war?

Marginalized and humiliated in the management of the "Libyan" crisis, can the African Union, should it, embark on this adventure in Mali without pondering the lessons of the fall of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi?

Where is the consistency in the conduct of the affairs of the continent by the African leaders, most of whom opposed in vain the intervention of NATO in Libya, when they agree on the need for a deployment of military forces in Mali, with incalculable consequences?

# The extreme vulnerability of women in zones of conflict

The International Crisis Group warns, rightly, that "in the current context, an offensive of the Malian army supported by the forces of ECOWAS and/or other forces has every chance of causing more civilian casualties in the North, of worsening insecurity and economic and social conditions in the whole of the country, of radicalizing ethnic communities, promoting the violent expression of all the extremist groups and, finally, dragging the entire region into a multifaceted conflict, without a front line, in the Sahara “ [1].

These consequences are particularly serious for women. Their vulnerability, which is on everyone's lips, should be present in everyone's mind when decisions are being taken, and should serve as a deterrent when war can be avoided. It can be. It must be, in Mali.

It should be remembered that the cases of rape that we deplore in the occupied areas of the North of our country are likely to multiply with the deployment of thousands of soldiers. To this risk there should be added a more or less disguised prostitution that commonly develops in areas of great insecurity and therefore the risk of the spread of HIV/AIDS. Does the plan for military intervention which the Security Council will consider provide for ways to really protect the women and girls of Mali from such a disastrous situation?

Let us also remember that in the whole of the territory the economic sanctions imposed by the international community on the people of Mali in the name of the return to a discredited constitutional order greatly affect vulnerable groups. Because of the sexual division of labour women are confronted on the domestic level with the enormous difficulty of providing their families with water, food, domestic energy supply, medicines. This daily and endless struggle for survival is already in itself a war. In these circumstances of the precariousness and vulnerability of populations, and of women in particular, the military option that is being prepared is a remedy which is very likely to be worse than the disease, whereas a peaceful alternative, coming from Malian society, civil, political and military, would be constructive.

## Inconsistencies of the international community

Each of the powerful representatives of the “international community”, as well as ECOWAS and the African Union has had words to say about our cursed woes as women in situations of conflict.

Let us give him his due, the French president, François Holland, who plays the role of leader in defence of the military option, stressed the suffering of women “first victims of the violence of wars” [2].

And yet, he said on September 26, 2012, in New York, at the special meeting on the Sahel, on the sidelines of the General Assembly of the United Nations, “I know that there may be a temptation to conduct negotiations. Negotiate with terrorist groups? There can be no question of that. Any loss of time, any process that drags on could only play into the hands of the terrorists”.

“One must know how to end a war’, the US and French presidents seem to be saying. “The war in Afghanistan has been prolonged beyond the initial mission. It is stirring up the rebellion as much as making it possible to fight it. It is time to put an end in good order to this intervention and I make the commitment here to do so”- said the candidate François Hollande, in his presidential inauguration speech.

The American Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Hillary Clinton, whose stopover on October 29, 2012, in Algiers, was partly designed to convince president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to join the war camp, addressed the meeting of African heads of state in Addis Ababa in these terms: "In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continuation of acts of violence against women and girls and the activities of armed groups in the Eastern region of the country are a constant source of concern for us. The African Union and the United Nations should spare no effort to help the DRC to react to these incessant security crises".

The initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, entitled "United to end violence against women", launched on 25 January 2008, pays special attention to women in West Africa. This was before the wars in Ivory Coast and Libya, which have largely compromised the achievement of the objectives assigned to this initiative. We understand his reservations about military deployment and hope that he will not support the plan for intervention of the heads of state of ECOWAS. War, let us remember, represents extreme violence against the civilian population, including women. It can only take us further away from the objectives defined by this initiative.

Why do the powerful of this world, who are so concerned about the plight of African women, not tell us the truth about the mining, oil and geostrategic interests that are stake in wars?

The president of the commission of the AU, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, for her part, stressed: "it is crucial that women contribute to, and engage actively in, the search for a solution to the conflict. Their voices must be heard in the efforts to promote and consolidate democracy in their country. To this end, have no doubt that you can count on the support of the African Union, as well as my personal commitment." [3].

The appointment for the first time of a woman to this post could be a real factor of political emancipation for women and therefore for liberation of the continent, if Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma agreed to broaden the base of the debate on African women by incorporating the global issues which are being concealed from us.

## Our sad status as hostages

Mali is a country that is being simultaneously attacked, humiliated and taken hostage by political and institutional actors who are in no way accountable to us, starting with ECOWAS. One of the expressions of this reality is the huge pressure on what remains of the Malian state. The acting president, Dioncounda Traore, is the first among Malian hostages. If he thought it necessary to remind people, on October 19, 2012, at the meeting of the group of support and monitoring of the situation in our country, that he was not a president who has been taken hostage, it is precisely because he is. Otherwise he would not have repeated three times, on September 21, 2012, the eve of the anniversary of the independence of our country, that he prefers dialogue and consultation, and asked the United Nations, three days later, for immediate international military intervention. "I am aware of being the president of a country at war but the first choice is dialogue and negotiation. The second choice is dialogue and negotiation and", he insisted, "the third choice is dialogue and negotiation. We will make war if we have no other choice... ", he said in his speech to the nation, before changing his mind.

Like the interim president, we are all hostages, prisoners of an unequal and unjust economic and political system which excels in the art of breaking down resistance by blackmailing us over money. The abolition of foreign aid is resulting this year, 2012, in a shortfall of 429 billion CFA francs. Almost all public investment has been suspended. The closure of many companies has led to sackings and layoffs for economic reasons for tens of thousands of workers, while food prices continue to rise. The most important losses are in the building industry and in public works. Tourism, crafts, hotels and restaurants, which have suffered since 2008 the consequences of the inclusion of Mali on the list of countries at risk, have been severely affected, whereas before they represented substantial sources of

income for the regions today occupied, including Timbuktu.

When we talk about having the status of hostages it is in no way meant to make less dramatic the unbearable suffering of the European hostages and their families, but to remind people of the equal gravity of the situation of all human beings trapped in systems for which they are not personally responsible. However, the question is to know how to act so that our country gets back its territorial integrity and peace, and that the six French hostages held by AQIM are returned to their families safe and sound, without their release paving the way for military action that would jeopardize the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in northern Mali who are just as much hostages.

## The proxy war

The choice of war feeds on a lack of awareness of the real issues. Jacques Attali gives, for those who want to seize it, a key to understanding the situation which proves, if proof were needed, that the proposed military intervention is a proxy war. According to him, France must act “... because this (the Sahel) region can become a rear base for training terrorists and suicide bombers who will attack Western interests throughout the region; and even by multiple means of passage, in Europe. They are still only a few hundred; if nothing is done, they will be soon be thousands, coming from Pakistan, Indonesia and Latin America. And the Niger uranium deposits, essential to France, are not far away. [\[4\]](#)”

The distribution of roles between France, ECOWAS, the African Union, Europe and the United Nations is clarified. ECOWAS, as well as many Malians and Africans, did not understand up until now what was behind the idea of a mission to Mali. According to Jacques Attali, the regional organization had to act “to give back to the civil authorities the means to decide, without fear, to restore security, to restructure the military apparatus and to restart economic activity; in the North, to put an end to this secession, it will take military action on the ground, with long-distance logistical support, means of observation, drones and a capacity for acting within a strategic framework. Who can do all that? Obviously not the Malian government alone, which has neither arms nor authority. Not ECOWAS which does not have sufficient military resources to ensure all of the necessary action and which cannot even expect to receive a request from the Malian government, which is under the influence of uncertain forces. Nor the African Union, at least not alone. Then who? the United Nations? NATO? The question will be posed very quickly. It is being posed today. Here again, Europe should obviously be united and get into a position to decide and to act. It is not doing that. However, if the current negotiations fail, it will soon be necessary think about setting up a coalition of the kind that has worked in Afghanistan. Before an equivalent of September 11, 2001 hits us”. [\[5\]](#).

So, everything is clear. The war envisaged in Mali would be a prolongation of the one in Afghanistan, where France and the United States are gradually withdrawing after eleven years of fighting and heavy losses in men, in equipment and in money. The Sahel is the zone of influence of France, which takes the leadership of affairs concerning Mali and subcontracts the military violence of ECOWAS. This transfer is made in order to be politically correct and not be accused of colonialism and imperialism, but also to reduce the cost of the war and to avoid French casualties. Public opinion in Western countries tolerates less and less their citizens dying in defence of “our” causes. Thus, in the same way that the Senegalese sharpshooters were (in colonial times), African troops are called upon to lend France a hand.

## The globalization of evils and networks

Religious radicalism has no need, in such a context, of northern Mali to spread in West Africa and in the world. The globalized economy, on the basis of injustice and inequality, is a machine to crush local economies, societies and

cultures which provides the necessary fertile ground.

From the Red Sea to the Atlantic, from Afghanistan to Nigeria, from Toulouse, where Mohamed Merah acted and was shot, to Timbuktu, the issues are ideological, civilizational, of identity, but also economic, political and geostrategic. The actors and the opposing forces are roughly the same, with variations that can be manipulated, such as the Tuareg rebellion in Mali.

On the other hand, Afghans, Pakistanis, Algerians and other preachers are not newcomers to Mali. They made their appearance in mosques from the 1990s, at the time when the social consequences of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) on employment, income and social ties began to be felt.

## The *badenya* perspective as an alternative to war

Malian and African women, very conscious of the issues at stake and of the deadly workings of neoliberal globalization, do not endorse wars. To the warmongering and predatory values of the dominant economic order, we oppose pacifist values, which reconcile us with each other, as well as with the rest of the world. *Badenya* ("children of the mother"), is one of these values that we, women of Mali, cultivate more and counterpose to the masculine value *fadenya* ("children of the father") which in its ultraliberal version authorizes the unbridled and fratricidal race for profit, to the point of selling off profitable public companies, ceding farmland to those who dominate us and accepting the partition of the country.

Deeply rooted in the *badenya* perspective, our rejection of war has its roots in a conception of procreation according to which bringing a child into the world is already a way of going to the front (*musokele*). And there are too many of us who perish in giving life. We battle every day against hunger, poverty, disease, so that each child can grow up, work, take their place in society and their share of responsibility.

So in every soldier, in every rebel and every new convert to jihadism, who will fight against each other in the event of war, each of us recognizes a brother, a son, a nephew, a cousin. Yesterday, they were looking for social status through employment, income or even a visa. This was often in vain... Now, they have their trembling hands on weapons of war.

Lucidity and political maturity should be our weapons in this world without faith or law. There is no reason for Mali to become engaged on a terrain where France and the United States of America are retreating, despite the firepower of NATO.

To the war economy, we women of Mali counterpose the economy of life, making of the transition that is taking place an historic opportunity to meet the triple challenge of knowledge, citizenship and dialogue. The way things are evolving on the ground, including the willingness to negotiate of Ansar Dine and the MNLA, the constant modifications in the relationships of forces, as well as the strategies and interactions between the different groups involved, must be considered with the necessary attention, so as not only to avoid a potentially tragic war, but also to avoid the pitfalls of past agreements.

The national consultations that have been envisaged for months must finally take place, enabling Malian society as a whole to come together and to define itself the basis and the conditions of an agreed (and not imposed) solution to the present conflict. We, women of Mali, will contribute fully to this, just as tomorrow we will contribute to the

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reestablishment of democracy in our country according to the values of society and of culture that we are familiar with.

We must, in short, make credible and strengthen the capacity of analysis, anticipation and proposition of Malian civil, political and military society.

We ask all those who share our approach to address immediately the main actors of the international community, in writing or in any other forms of expression, arguing that the Security Council should not adopt a resolution authorizing the deployment of thousands of soldiers in Mali. ?

*November 20, 2012*

**Signatories:** Aminata d. TRAORÉ; SISSOKO Safi SY; SANOGO Sylvie Kavanagh; IMBO Mama SY; Kadiatou TOURE; Thi Selikene SIDIBE (old); Dickson Rao s; Chris Dhar; DOUMBIA Fanta DIALLO; KONE Mamou Thapa; TRAORÉ Omar Salah. Penda DIALLO TRAORÉ; Dey Kadiatou KOUYATÉ; Aminata BIGGS; Oumou KASONGO. Alicia KAKARA. Awa Kat; Aminata DOUMBIA. Fatoumata COULIBALY; Babu drink; Awa Thapa; Bintou KONE; Fatoumata MARIKO; Mariam KONE; Cheikh DIARRA; Oumou KEITA; Dhee. Ramdas KAUR. Rokia NATARAJAN. Aref Khalid; ADA NANTOUMA; Awa COULIBALY; Gerry DOUMBIA. Fanta KANTE. S Chung; Jaba TANAGER; KATTA Mama DIARRA; Ishmael DIABATE; Karamoko BAMBABA; Doumbi FAKOLY. Coumba SCHOEMAN; Pratham SOH-MELOCHE. Nathalie me DELA-MOUNIER.

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[1] "Mali: avoid escalation", International Crisis Group - <http://www.crisisgroup.org/fr -July...>

[2] Kinshasa, fourteenth Summit of the international organization of "Francophonie"- French-speaking countries

[3] Meeting of the Group of support and monitoring of the situation in Mali - November 19, 2012

[4] Published in *L'Express*, Attali, May 28, 2012 Blog: <http://www.attali.com/actualite/blo...>

[5] Ibid.