

Crisis in Mali

The violent stoning of a reportedly unmarried couple to death, by hard-line Islamists, in the remote desert town of Aguelhok, Mali has drawn outrage and condemnation. Analysts worry this is growing evidence of the rebel fighters' intention to impose strict Islamic law in the vast territory under their control.

"We were appalled by the recent stoning of two individuals in Aguelhok for adultery," said Canadian Minister of foreign affairs, John Baird.

The desecration of the tombs of Sufi Muslim saints by Islamist fighters in the fabled city of Timbuktu, also known as the city of 333 saints, has also been condemned. The destruction has come to symbolize the twin crises in Mali. In a matter of weeks, this once apparently stable Sahara Desert nation collapsed with a rebellion in the north, followed by a coup in the south.

Tens of thousands of Malians have fled the besieged northern towns, across Mali's borders into refugee camps in neighboring countries. Many are still heading to the capital.

After his recent return from a prolonged medical absence due to an attack suffered at the hands of angry mobs, Mali's caretaker president, Dioncounda Traore, has personally promised to take charge of the dangerous situation in the north.

Regional leaders, the U.S., and Canada fear it has become a safe haven for what they call Islamist terrorism. Traore says it is time to "drive out the invaders."

"Canada welcomes the return of interim president Dioncounda Traoré to Mali after medical treatment for injuries he sustained during an attack. I am encouraged by Mr. Traoré's commitment to make the transitional government more effective, and we encourage all Malians to work together to restore democratic order to the country," said Minister John Baird.

The al Qaida-affiliated Islamists groups in the north are reported to be well-funded and indulge in kidnapping for ransoms in order to boost their war chests.

Malians just want peace and many are urging the interim government to drive the rebels out of the north and restore peace and order, saying they will not allow Mali to be divided.

According to Minister Baird, “Canada stands ready to work with international partners, including the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union, to find a sustainable resolution to the crisis in Mali.”

World Media Forum is encouraged by the Interim President’s remarks. Western Africa has a strong Muslim presence and should promote the peaceful teachings and practice of Islam above all else. Western Africa should focus on riding itself from the influence of Islamic fundamentalists. WMF strongly feels that Africa is poised to present to the world how Muslim nations can promote peace, tolerance and interfaith harmony.

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