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Fear grows as Mali extremists compile list of unwed mothers

CNN (12.10.2012) - Radical Islamists are compiling a list of unmarried mothers in northern Mali, raising fears of cruel punishments such as stoning, amputations and executions, a senior United Nations official said.

Islamists controlling most of the north have vowed to impose a stricter form of Islamic law, or sharia. Local radical groups have said the law condemns relationships outside marriage.

In July, they forced a man and a woman into two holes and stoned them to death for committing adultery as terrified residents quietly watched in remote Aguelhok town.

The U.N. assistant secretary-general for human rights, who just returned from a visit to Mali, said there are reports that Islamist groups are compiling lists of women who have had children out of wedlock, or who were unmarried and pregnant.

"The threat is there, it's real and people live with it and they are afraid of those lists," Ivan Simonovic said. "This could indicate that these women are at imminent risk of being subjected to cruel and inhumane punishment."

Extremists have conducted public executions, amputations, floggings and other inhuman and degrading punishments, he said.

Women and children face greater risk, he said.

More women in the region are ending up in forced marriages. And with wives costing less than \$1,000, husbands are also reselling the women, according to Simonovic.

He said the process is "a smokescreen for enforced prostitution and rapes" occurring in the region.

"Civil and political rights are being severely restricted as a result of the imposition of a strict interpretation of sharia law, and systemic cruel and inhumane punishments are being implemented," Simonovic said.

The militants are also buying children and enlisting them as soldiers, paying their families \$600 -- a major incentive in a country where more than half the population lives on \$1.25 a day, he said.

In addition, the Islamists have also banned smoking, drinking, watching sports on television and listening to music.

"We don't have to answer to anyone over the application of sharia," Islamist commissioner Aliou Toure said in August. "This is the form of Islam practiced for thousands of years."

Mali plunged in chaos in March after a military ruler overthrew the president, shaking one of West Africa's most stable democracies.

The coup leader stepped down in May and transferred power to a civilian transitional government, but uncertainty looms.

Ethnic Tuareg rebels and Islamist militants took advantage of the chaos to seize the northern portion of the country. Months later, two groups with ties to al Qaeda toppled the Tuareg movement. The two groups now control two-thirds of northern Mali, an area the size of France.

West African states and the nation's transitional government have asked the U.N. Security Council to authorize military intervention to oust the radical groups. The Security Council said it needs more details before it can make a decision on the request.

Mali tomb destroyed by Islamists

The tomb of a Muslim saint in Mali has been destroyed by Islamists, two months after similar incidents in the northern region brought widespread condemnation.

The Daily Telegraph (17.09.2012) - A local politician told the AFP news agency that the Islamists destroyed the mausoleum of Cheik El-Kebir more than 200 miles from Gao.

Sources said the Islamist militant Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) was responsible for the destruction.

"Today in Gao, the Islamists boasted about the destruction of the mausoleum of Cheikh El-Kebir. They said they had smashed the mausoleum on Saturday, a town leader who would not give his name told AFP. "This is a crime," he added.

Oumar Ould Gaddy, a Gao resident who is believed to be close to MUJAO, confirmed the reports.

"Cheik El-Kebir's mausoleum north of Gao was destroyed. That's true," he said. "The Islamists have confirmed this. There is another mausoleum which they will also destroy soon."

Kebir's tomb is venerated by the Kunta tribe whose members live in Mali, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger.

The latest attack came two months after Islamists destroyed two tombs at the ancient Djingareyber mud mosque in Timbuktu soon after taking over northern Mali amid chaos in the wake of a coup attempt in the capital Bamako.

The fighters from the Islamist group Ansar Dine (Defenders of Faith) began their destruction of the city's cultural treasures on July 1, shortly after UNESCO placed them on a list of endangered World Heritage sites.

Declaring the ancient Muslim shrines "haram", or forbidden in Islam, Ansar Dine set about destroying seven of Timbuktu's 16 mausolea of ancient Muslim saints.

They also destroyed the sacred door of the 15th-century Sidi Yahya mosque.

Along with Sidi Yahya, Djingareyber and the Sankore mosque bear witness to Timbuktu's golden age as an intellectual and spiritual capital which was crucial in the spread of Islam throughout Africa.

Islamic police publicly amputate five alleged bandits in Mali

AP (10.09.2012) – Islamic police said they used a stage in a public square to amputate the right hand and left foot of five accused thieves in a city of Mali on Monday, in the latest application of Sharia law in the country's north.

That region of Mali, an area the size of Texas or France, was overrun by rebels allied with al-Qaida five months ago.

Despite a loud outcry from the international community and protests from locals, the Islamists have applied an extreme interpretation of Islam, and have stoned to death an adulterous couple, cut off the hand of another thief and publicly whipped people accused of other transgressions.

Monday's amputations occurred in the northern city of Gao, said Aliou Hamahar Toure, its Islamic police commissioner.

He told The Associated Press by telephone that the five victims had held up passenger buses leaving the city, including those belonging to the popular fleet owned by Rimbo Transport. In accordance with Shariah law, they each their right hand and left foot cut off. They were then transferred to the Gao hospital, Toure said.

He claimed the accused thieves did not scream when their limbs were hacked off with a large knife. "They just said, 'Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! ('God is Great') until it was over. Then we took them to the hospital, where they are now receiving intensive care," said Toure.

Ibrahim Toure, a resident of Gao who is not related to the police commissioner, said he was passing by the square just after the amputations and saw children carrying buckets of water to wash away the blood.

"There was blood everywhere," said Toure, who described how the children also were trying to carry bags of sand in order to soak up the liquid.

The amputations took place in a public square in Gao known as Place de l'Independence, or Independence Place. The five victims were brought onto the stage, but unlike at past applications of Shariah law the Islamists had not publicly announced the punishment beforehand, and had blocked people from gathering to see it, said Toure.

Gao has seen some of the most intense protests against Islamic rule in the north of Mali, and the Islamists have been forced to backtrack on some of their proposed punishments.

Youth leader Ahmadou Ould Fneiny said that residents were shocked by Monday's amputations and are trying to decide what to do.

"People are disturbed by this. Yes, we have seen whippings in Gao before. And we have heard of amputations elsewhere. But an amputation here, we have never seen one until now," he said.

Kidnapped Swiss Christian freed amid unrest

Compass Direct News (27.04.2012) – Separatist Islamist rebels released a Swiss Christian woman kidnapped by a private militia on April 15 amid political turmoil in Timbuktu, Mali, according to a Swiss foreign ministry statement. Armed members of the militant Islamic group Ansar Dine handed Beatrice Stockly to Swiss diplomats on Tuesday (April 24), Reuters reported. Before rebels captured Timbuktu on April 1, most Westerners had reportedly left due to fears of being kidnapped and passed on to Al-Qaeda cells. The terrorist group's North has been holding Westerners for millions of dollars in ransom payments from previous kidnappings in recent years. Stockly, a Christian social worker in her 40s, had refused to leave Timbuktu, 705 kilometers (439 miles) northeast of the capital, when it fell to Tuareg rebels and Islamist extremists. She was in good health "considering the circumstances," according to the Swiss foreign ministry statement. Ansar Dine militants took custody of Stockly after a shootout with an unidentified private militia that had seized her and wanted to sell her to AQIM. Ansar Dine, which has imposed *sharia* (Islamic law) in areas under its control in the north, then handed Stockly to the Swiss government without demanding a ransom, according to Agence France-Presse. Stockly is reportedly safe in Burkina Faso.
