



Committee on International Justice and Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3160

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

April 29, 2013

Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2201 C. Street
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to express concern for the situation in Mali and to offer some recommendations that we have developed in consultation with Catholic Relief Services and the Catholic Church in Mali.

Armed conflict is subsiding and the northern provinces are returning to Malian control, although violent attacks and banditry continue and AQIM terrorist forces still remain in Malian territory. The conditions in northern Mali do not make for a sustainable peace, a state of affairs that has persisted since independence. Even during Mali's twenty year period of democratic rule, the government failed to establish a legitimate, decentralized local government in the northern provinces, and fail to provide reasonable local autonomy and protection of civil and human rights. Thus a return to the status ante-bellum will not resolve the root causes of the crisis. If Mali is to build a sustainable peace, the government and people of Mali will have to build national unity based on justice and reconciliation.

To build peace, the people of Mali need continuing assistance from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the UN, the EU, France and the United States. In line with the ECOWAS and Mali Framework Agreement of April 6, 2012, Mali needs to establish and strengthen a stable, legitimate interim government that conducts a national dialogue with civil society and religious leaders to build national unity, religious freedom, and a roadmap towards free and fair elections and a return to full constitutional, democratic rule.

Mali needs help in reforming the military to re-establish full subordination to civilian leaders and a unified, disciplined force of officers and soldiers trained in their responsibility to protect life and the human dignity of all Malians.

As a vital complement to the national dialogue foreseen in Framework Agreement, Mali, with the help of its international partners, should promote sustained, long term dialogue among civil society representatives of the different regions of the country. This dialogue would support national negotiations towards a sustainable peace, disarmament of militias, commitments to cut links to AQIM, and national unity under the conditions set out in the National Accord of 1991 and the Algiers Accord of 2006.

Malian authorities and international partners should support the engagement and participation of religious leaders in rebuilding civil society and continuing their peacebuilding and reconciliation

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initiatives. This civil society and community based peacebuilding is vital if people are to heal the wounds of decades of injustice and violence and to rebuild the social fabric of relationships necessary for peaceful coexistence.

We urge the United States to provide immediate humanitarian assistance for all those who have lost their livelihoods during the fighting, and long-term economic assistance to reduce poverty in the regions affected by the violence and across Mali where too many people live in crushing poverty. Catholic Relief Services has worked in Mali for a number of years, more recently supporting Malians who have fled the fighting to other parts of the country or to neighboring countries as refugees. CRS works closely with local Catholic Church partners. The on-the-ground network extends the impact of the significant resources CRS has received from the United States Government.

During the political transition period, Mali may continue to need the aid of the Africa-led International Support Mission to Mali, and in the short term may require help from France to combat terrorist and insurgency activities, hostage taking, and trafficking in drugs and arms. But military anti-terrorism efforts alone cannot succeed unless priority and the preponderance of resources are given to long-term initiatives to rebuild a legitimate national government, a disciplined military, and a sustained national dialogue to build unity and a lasting peace. As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* notes: “It is essential that the use of force, even when necessary, be accompanied by a courageous and lucid analysis of the reasons behind terrorist attacks. Also needed is a particular commitment on the ‘political and educational levels’ in order to resolve, with courage and determination, the problems that in certain dramatic circumstances can foster terrorism: ‘the recruitment of terrorists in fact is easier in situations where rights are trampled and injustices are tolerated over a long period of time’” (No. 514).

The bishops of Mali have said: “The people of Mali must remain united in their diversity. It is this diversity, cultural, religious, and ethnic, among others, that is the richness of our people. We ask all the faithful in the place where they live, the activities they lead and wherever they might find themselves to work towards a return to peace and unity between all our sons and daughters.”

We look forward to working with you to promote the unity and peace that Mali desperately needs at this time. In the coming weeks, USCCB staff will be contacting State Department officials to discuss these reflections and to explore how the Church in the United States and in Mali can work with State Department to build a sustainable peace.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace