

THE  
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## Report of the Independent Observer

Observations on the Implementation of the  
Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in  
Mali, Resulting from the Algiers Process

August 2021

This report presents the observations of The Carter Center in its role as the Independent Observer of the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers process, for the period between January and July 2021. The Independent Observer carries out its mandate through observation of meetings and activities related to the implementation of the agreement, including the Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) sessions, the CSA subcommittees, and the Technical Security Committee (CTS). It maintains ongoing contact with the key stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of the agreement, as well as with members of civil society, researchers, nongovernmental organizations representatives, and Mali's international partners. The Independent Observer team also draws on official Malian documents and other materials relating to the situation in Mali and the implementation of the agreement. The Independent Observer thanks all Malian and international stakeholders for facilitating its work, meetings, and access to relevant information.

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## ACRONYMS

BATFAR	<i>Bataillons des forces armées reconstituées</i>   Battalions of the Reconstituted Armed Forces
CCI	<i>Conseil consultatif interrégional</i>   Interregional Consultative Council
CMA	<i>Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad</i>   Coordination of Azawad Movements
CNT	<i>Conseil national de Transition</i>   National Transitional Council
CSA	<i>Comité de suivi de l’Accord</i>   Agreement Monitoring Committee
CSP	<i>Comité stratégique permanent</i>   Strategic Permanent Framework
CTS	<i>Commission technique de sécurité</i>   Technical Security Committee
CVJR	<i>Commission Vérité Justice et Réconciliation</i>   Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission
DDR	<i>Désarmement, démobilisation et réinsertion</i>   Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
FAMa	<i>Forces armées malien</i> nes   Malian Armed Forces
FDD	<i>Fond de développement durable</i>   Sustainable Development Fund
FDS	<i>Forces de défense et de sécurité</i>   National Defense and Security Forces
MINUSMA	<i>Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation au Mali</i>   United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MOC	<i>Mécanisme opérationnel de coordination</i>   Operational Coordination Mechanism
M5-RFP	<i>Mouvement du 5 juin-Rassemblement des forces patriotiques</i>   June 5 Movement – Rally of Patriotic Forces
PTF	<i>Partenaires techniques et financiers</i>   Technical and Financial Partners
SSD-RN	<i>Stratégie spécifique de développement des régions du nord</i>   Special Development Strategy for the Regions of Northern Mali

## TERMINOLOGY

CSA	Created in July 2015 in accordance with Chapter 19 of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the CSA is responsible for monitoring, supervising, and coordinating implementation. The CSA is composed of the government of Mali, the Signatory Movements, and the Mediation Team (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, ECOWAS, the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the African Union, and the European Union). The permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are invited to participate in the committee.
DDR	Refers to the process of integrating ex-combatants from the movements, once disarmed and demobilized, into government institutions, including the national defense and security forces. To be distinguished from socioeconomic reintegration for ex-combatants seeking to enter civilian life outside of the public sector.
International Mediation	Members of the international community referred to in Article 58 of the agreement.
Signatory Movements (movements)	Coordination of Azawad Movements and the Platform of Signatory Movements – Algiers Declaration, June 14, 2014, the two coalitions of armed movements that signed the agreement in 2015.
Signatory Parties (parties)	Government of Mali, CMA, and the Platform.
Platform	Platform of Movements – Algiers Declaration, June 14, 2014, a coalition of armed movements.
Transition	The governing framework established, for a period of 18 months after the Aug. 18, 2020, coup, beginning with the inauguration of the president of the Transition on Sept. 25, 2020. Following the second coup on May 24, 2021, the governing bodies of the Transition are the president, the cabinet, and the National Transitional Council.

## Executive Summary

Six years into the implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers process, the Independent Observer notes that, while the Signatory Parties' efforts to relaunch implementation between January and July 2021 produced few tangible achievements, the parties have engaged in positive dialogue and taken steps in the right direction.

The reporting period was marked by frequent change and a stop-and-start rhythm. Two major events stymied implementation and underscored the fragility of the peace process: (1) the April 13 assassination of Sidi Brahim Ould Sidat, the sitting president of the Coordination of Azawad Movements and a key actor of the peace process since 2015, and (2) a second coup d'état on May 24. In addition, the general lack of public information about implementation or accountability for inaction continues to fuel growing mistrust toward the agreement by segments of the public and some members of the political class.

These developments, combined with the absence of an effective intra-Malian framework for managing implementation during most of the reporting period, mean that persistent disagreements on key issues continue and that the next steps in the process remain unclear. Among the key issues are: the reorganization of the reconstituted security and defense forces (FDS), including reaching agreement on the quotas and ranks for ex-combatants from the movements to be integrated into the national forces; the next steps of the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process; the form that decentralization and the enhanced representation of the northern population in national institutions will take; and how and when the implementation of the first development projects—concrete peace dividends from the agreement—will be implemented in northern and other regions of Mali.

Despite the lack of progress on these key issues, several positive steps occurred during the reporting period. The Agreement Monitoring Committee (CSA) held its first-ever meetings outside of Bamako—in Kidal in February and Kayes in March. In June, the parties created the “G-5,” a working group on the agreement that brings together, under the auspices of the minister of national reconciliation, peace, and social cohesion, the four ministers from the Signatory Movements. In addition, the prime minister officially designated the minister of national reconciliation as in charge of implementation, a step that aims to clarify the leadership of the government’s implementation efforts. This new framework, combined with existing forums, aims to help resolve day-to-day, pragmatic issues in the implementation process. Further, the parties also made progress on several interim measures, including standing up the commune-level interim authorities in the regions of Taoudenit and Menaka; finalizing the catch-up phase (*rattrapage*) of the accelerated DDR process; adopting the first 16 projects to be paid for by the Sustainable Development Fund (FDD); completing the Battalion of Reconstituted Armed Forces (BATFAR) in Kidal; and continuing the active participation of the nine women introduced into the CSA in November 2020.

The challenge of the coming period is to build on the recent positive steps to overcome the core, unresolved differences that have long impeded the implementation of the agreement’s main provisions. Key actions are those that focus squarely on near-term impact for Malians, such as:

- Fully standing up the BATFARs and ensuring their complete integration into the FDS, with the aim of improving both security in northern Mali and mutual trust among the parties.

- Adopting a comprehensive DDR plan that sets a clear path leading to the disbanding of the Signatory Movements.
- Launching the first FDD-funded development projects in northern Mali.
- Passing the law on the national reparations policy proposed by the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) to advance national justice and reconciliation efforts.

In addition, on the political front, **the upcoming elections and potential constitutional reform provide opportunities to enshrine key provisions of the agreement in national texts and institutions.** The principle of locally led governance and the enhancement of the northern population's representation in national institutions, stipulated in Title II of the agreement, can be taken into consideration in Mali's new electoral and institutional architecture. Finalizing the administrative and electoral redistricting in the regions of Ménaka and Taoudenit, as well as the *cercles* of Almoustarat and Achibogho, before the next legislative elections would demonstrate the concrete implementation of these principles.

Given the history of tensions and clashes among the movements, which have long slowed implementation, the ongoing reconciliation efforts between the CMA, the Platform, and other groups should be supported. Yet at the same time, ambiguity surrounding whether the movements actually intend to demobilize hangs over the implementation process. To sustainably relaunch implementation, the movements need to take a more proactive approach to both DDR and the wider implementation process.

As the transitional period unfolds, the Malian parties and the CSA will need to further strengthen their efforts to communicate publicly about the agreement, including their support for it. Implementation could well suffer further setbacks if candidates in upcoming elections, playing on voters' frustrations, deploy simplistic, anti-agreement rhetoric that overlooks the agreement's role in preventing armed confrontation among the parties and fostering national reconciliation. Such messages could create a climate that would leave the newly elected government less inclined to pursue implementation.

Equally critical to progress is enhanced engagement by the international community and the International Mediation, as provided for in the agreement. Actively monitoring and, as necessary, spurring the parties to act is necessary if they are to overcome longstanding differences between them. International stakeholders acting primarily as bystanders of implementation, as some have suggested be their role, ignores both Title 6 of the agreement and the support the Malian parties need. The international community's investment in the implementation process can be maximized by consistently helping the parties tackle the core, unresolved issues highlighted above.

**The implementation process can still be revitalized in the remainder of the transition.** As of late July, the parties have agreed to revamp their approach, working more closely together to achieve the objectives set in their roadmaps and declarations. Supported by a hopeful but cautious international community, they must now translate that consensus into action on the most central and challenging elements of the agreement.

## Introduction

The hopes for an accelerated relaunch of implementation during the transition have not yet been realized. Several events, including the May 24 coup d'état that overthrew the first transitional government, increased uncertainty, and slowed implementation. The assassination of Ould Sidatt, a leader of the CMA and key voice within the CSA, came as a shock. As the president of the CSA said, as long as the crime remains unsolved, it represents an open wound in the fragile partnership binding the parties.<sup>2</sup>

On June 13, the prime minister of the second transitional government, Choguel Kokalla Maïga, outlined the priorities of the next phase of the transition: the reform of the electoral law; the constitutional reform process and an “intelligent” *relecture* (review or revision) of the agreement; a national forum on rebuilding state institutions; and the fight against corruption.<sup>3</sup> On July 28, the transitional government presented an updated action plan to the National Transitional Council (CNT), Mali’s legislative body during the Transition; among other topics, the plan calls for the “consensual *relecture*” of the agreement and the completion (*parachèvement*) of the implementation process.

In response to pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the rest of the international community, the government has pledged to hold to the scheduled date of Feb. 27, 2022, for the first round of the presidential election. The International Mediation has also maintained its work program established prior to May 24, with the expectation that the parties would resume discussions based on the CSA meetings in Kidal in February and Kayes in March.

In June, the prime minister announced that the minister of reconciliation, peace, and national cohesion would oversee the government’s implementation efforts, a key step after years of shifting, unclear leadership of the process. In addition, the formation of the “G-5” working group, under the auspices of the minister of national reconciliation and including the ministers from the movements, may also help improve the process of closing gaps between the parties.

Several other positive developments in the implementation process were also observed, including the active participation of nine women in the CSA, the completion of the catch-up (*rattrapage*) phase of the accelerated DDR process, and the standing up of commune-level interim authorities in the regions of Taoudenit and Ménaka. Yet the parties’ overall approach to implementation, described by the Independent Observer in previous reports, remained largely unchanged.<sup>4</sup>

Day-to-day conditions continue to deteriorate for many Malians, particularly those in zones far from Bamako without basic services. Currently, more than 1,300 schools are closed, and 350,000 people are displaced.<sup>5</sup> Despite local ceasefire agreements, attacks on civilians in central Mali continue, and

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<sup>2</sup> Following Sidatt’s death, the CMA’s decision to quickly appoint a new representative to the CSA was a positive sign of continuity in the implementation process.

<sup>3</sup> At the June 16 meeting of council of ministers, the president of the transition employed the phrase “intelligent and efficient” implementation of the agreement.

<sup>4</sup> See Report of the Independent Observer, Dec. 2020.

<sup>5</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/mli>, site accessed on May 12, 2021.

those against National Defense and Security Forces (FDS) are rising.<sup>6</sup> Between January and May, attacks attributed to Katiba Macina and Katiba Khalid ibn Al Walid in the Yorosso, Kati, and Bougouni *cercles* offered a stark reminder that southern Mali is also a target.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, civilians in the south are increasingly targeted; they represented one-third of the victims of violent attacks between January and April.<sup>8</sup> Individuals regarded as symbols of the government—village chiefs, teachers, and civil servants—have been among those threatened, abducted, or murdered, and school closures are increasing in the Segou, Koulikoro, and Sikasso regions.<sup>9</sup> Within this context, there is, among some Malians, the perception that the implementation process is disconnected from daily realities. This perception, in turn, contributes to the discourse by a part of Malian civil society and the political class that calls into question the agreement's relevance and potential to contribute to peace.

While the Security Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in June, the future of stabilization and counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel also faces new uncertainties.<sup>10</sup> The announcement of the wind down of operation *Barkhane*; increasing attacks against civilians in Niger and Burkina Faso; the death on April 20 of Chadian president Idriss Déby, which could alter Chad's role in MINUSMA and in anti-terrorist operations in the Sahel; and the growing security threat in the Mali-Mauritania and Niger-Chad border areas, as well as in the littoral states of the Gulf of Guinea, pose additional challenges to Mali's peace process and stabilization efforts across the Sahel.<sup>11</sup>

Against this background, the Independent Observer shares its most recent report, covering the period from January to July 2021, on the state of implementation of the agreement. The report describes the recent efforts to reinvigorate implementation and assesses the challenges and opportunities of the period to come.

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<sup>6</sup> Between January and March 2021, 58 Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) casualties were recorded as a result of 28 attacks; in the previous period (July to December 2020), there were 64 casualties as a result of 29 attacks. The Carter Center Mapping Project (April 2021), using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), publicly available at [www.acleddata.com](http://www.acleddata.com). Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, June 1, 2021, paras. 28, p.5, and 93, p.16.

<sup>7</sup> Attacks conducted by Jama't Nasrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) militants, including small-scale ambushes and one improved explosive device attack, clearly targeted government actors, including the FAMa and gendarmerie stations. Given its proximity to Bamako and the fact that militants were able to take full control of the site, the attack on the gendarmerie in Neguela on March 29 was particularly alarming. The Carter Center Mapping Project using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), publicly available at [www.acleddata.com](http://www.acleddata.com).

<sup>8</sup> The Carter Center Mapping Project using data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), publicly available at [www.acleddata.com](http://www.acleddata.com).

<sup>9</sup> In Yorosso *cercle*, 44 schools were forced to close because of threats from jihadis groups. "Segou, Sikasso, Koulikoro, encore des écoles fermées par des présumés djihadistes," Studio Tamani, 04/23/2021, <https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/jeunes/26664-segou-sikasso-koulikoro-encore-des-ecoles-fermees-par-des-presumes-jihadistes>

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2584, adopted on June 29, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, June 1, 2021, para. 40, p.7.

## I. Relaunching Implementation During the Transition: An Opportunity Still to Be Seized

As the transition began, the government's and the Signatory Movements' expression of support for the agreement, combined with its inclusion in the Transitional Charter, fueled the notion that the transitional period could represent a "window of opportunity" for accelerated implementation. At the transition's midpoint, the parties still need to translate this constructive outlook into concrete actions that increase nationwide support for the agreement. As Mali emerges from a tumultuous period of political and security challenges, there are some indications the parties may be beginning to do that.

*CSA Meetings - Intensifying efforts for greater transparency and accountability.* The holding of the CSA's first two meetings in 2021 in Kidal and Kayes could pave the way for increased accountability and transparency regarding implementation. Held outside of Bamako, the sessions symbolized the agreement's national scope and the parties' effort to increase ownership of the agreement throughout Mali. Beyond symbolism, at the meeting in Kayes, civil society, for the first time, participated in the CSA's discussions. The representatives from Kayes' civil society expressed their interest in the agreement and criticized the lack of information about implementation. A positive step was that several members of the government extended their time in Kayes to meet further with civil society. Including members of the movements in this spur-of-the-moment action would have strengthened the message of unity that the parties will need to convey if they are to build broader, nationwide support for the agreement.<sup>12</sup>

*Women's integration in the CSA and its subcommittees.* Since November 2020, nine women are part of the CSA, a significant step forward in implementing the mediation's and the parties' commitment to a more inclusive process. The nine women sit on the CSA, however, not as representatives of civil society but rather as representatives of the parties.<sup>13</sup> Since their inclusion, the women have participated actively, drawing attention to the pressing need to reopen schools, restore basic social services, and support other actions that improve living conditions. The women have also offered pragmatic suggestions to improve the CSA's efficacy (e.g., extending CSA sessions beyond a half-day to allow for more extended, constructive debate) and enhance its contact with local communities, particularly when the CSA meets outside of Bamako.

At the high-level CSA in February in Kidal, the parties, echoing the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council and the recommendations of the Independent Observer, reiterated their commitment to fully including women in their deliberations. Remaining steps to do so include women's full inclusion in decision-making and the addition of three more women to the CSA, along with 12 others to be included in the subcommittees.

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<sup>12</sup> Another step in this direction was the holding, on July 13 and 14, of hearings on the agreement before the CNT. See also, the Independent Observer's Oct. 2018 and Dec. 2020 reports.

<sup>13</sup> Notably, the recommendations of the Independent Observer and resolutions of the U.N. Security Council called for the participation of women, not as representatives appointed by the parties, but as independent representatives of civil society. See the Independent Observer's reports of Feb. 2019, p.33, Sept. 2019, pp.12, 17, Jan. 2020, p.29, and Dec. 2020, p.21; and U.N. Security Council resolutions 2265 (2016), 2364 (2017), 2423 (2018), 2849 (2019), 2531 (2020), and 2584 (2021).

*Decision-making and consultation.* For most of the period of observation the fora for dialogue and decision-making remained restricted to ad hoc meetings and CSA sessions. Longstanding weaknesses therefore continue, including the absence of consistent dialogue among the parties between CSA sessions and difficulties coordinating inter-ministerial action, especially on matters involving sensitive issues of national sovereignty.

Take, for example, the Feb. 8 and 9 high-level, decision-making meeting on defense and security issues. Despite the participation of key political, military, and paramilitary leaders from the Signatory Parties, as well as non-signatory groups subscribing to the agreement, and despite constructive technical work by the parties' designated experts on the first day, the leaders did not enter into substantive discussions. They cut the meeting short without identifying specific next steps.<sup>14</sup>

An irregular pattern of work also has slowed implementation.<sup>15</sup> Between January and July 2021, there were four CSA sessions. In March, the meeting of the CSA subcommittee on justice, reconciliation, and humanitarian issues was cancelled because of the absence of government representatives, a common occurrence in that subcommittee.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the May session of the subcommittee on social, economic, and cultural development proved unproductive because of the absence of representatives from both the Platform and the relevant government departments. Further, only after nearly 10 months of paralysis caused in part by disputes over the allowances for movement representatives, did the Technical Security Committee (CTS) hold its first meeting in May 2021.

In June, the parties took steps to address some of these problems. They created the "G-5," a working group that, under the auspices of the minister of national reconciliation, includes the four ministers representing the Signatory Movements. The "G-5", supplemented by reinvigorated weekly meetings between the Malian parties and the ministry of reconciliation, will potentially act as forum that helps overcome the day-to-day challenges of implementation.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the prime minister designated the minister of national reconciliation as the leader of the government's implementation effort. This step could potentially resolve the longstanding problem of weak inter-ministerial coordination on issues related to the agreement.

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<sup>14</sup> At the February session of the CSA, the government underlined that an inter-ministerial meeting was necessary to overcome the problems that caused the failure of the Feb. 8-9 meeting, and to prepare the ground for a subsequent meeting on that topic. This inter-ministerial meeting took place on May 6. The Ministry of Finance, however, did not attend, meaning that, on the fundamental issue of the government's financial capacity to absorb ex-combatants from the movements, there remains a lack of clarity. Thus, the persistent, central issue of quotas for ex-combatants to be integrated into the security forces and civilian administration remains unresolved. See also, the Independent Observer's Dec. 2020 report.

<sup>15</sup> The members of the subcommittees meet only on the eve of the CSA. The absence, since 2019, of a representative from the Ministry of Justice on the Justice committee is particularly notable, although a new representative has recently been appointed. Note, also, the absence of a representative from both the CMA and the Platform in the meeting of the sub-committee on defense and security issues before the CSA in March. See the Independent Observer report, Dec. 2020.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to highlight the limited time and attention devoted to the work of the CSA subcommittees.

<sup>17</sup> The four ministers hail from the CMA and from the two divisions of the Platform. They currently hold the positions of minister of industry and trade; minister of Malians abroad and African integration; minister of youth and sports, in charge of civic and citizen education; and minister of communication, digital economy, and the modernization of the bureaucracy.

## Reworking the roadmap

In December 2020, the parties updated their roadmap, outlining the priorities for the transition and beyond. The new roadmap, to be implemented between December 2020 and August 2022, established 28 commitments across the agreement's four main pillars. At the CSA in March in Kayes, the parties emphasized the need to revise the December roadmap to make its goals and timelines more realistic. As of the writing of this report, this has not occurred.

The status of two core measures in the roadmap—the territorial police and the drawing of administrative and electoral boundaries in the new northern regions (Ménaka and Taoudenit)—illustrates the ongoing problems. In March 2020, the council of ministers adopted the draft legislation creating the territorial police. The December 2020 roadmap stipulated that the law creating the territorial police was to be adopted by the CNT, followed by the creation and deployment of the first units in the first quarter of 2021. The government submitted the law to the CNT in late June,<sup>18</sup> however it was not adopted, and the CNT postponed a decision on it until the next parliamentary session.<sup>19</sup> It thus remains unclear if or when the law creating the territorial police will be adopted. Unrealistic timeframes marked the issue of redistricting, which the roadmap indicated would occur by March 2021. Drawing boundaries in the Ménaka and Taoudenit regions, with the aim of increasing the representation of northerners in national institutions, has not been prioritized within the complex, nationwide project of reviewing district lines.

Beyond the politico-institutional and security pillars of the agreement, which have often been the parties' primary focus, other long-neglected areas of the agreement continue to be overlooked. The parties pay little attention to justice and reconciliation issues, despite the significant work of the CVJR. Four of the seven priority measures related to justice in the roadmap have not been addressed, and their deadlines have now passed.<sup>20</sup> Another, the national policy on reparations, was adopted by the council of ministers on July 23; the CNT must now adopt implementing legislation.<sup>21</sup> The parties' response to the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, which submitted its report to the government in March and presented its recommendations to the CSA in June, has yet to be made public.<sup>22</sup>

The parties progressed in implementing the Special Development Strategy for the Regions of Northern Mali (SSD-RN), which is to be funded through the Sustainable Development Fund (FDD).

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<sup>18</sup> See, roadmap provisions 8 and 16: Adopt the bill creating the territorial police force in February; launch its countrywide deployment in March. In early February, the Independent Observer highlighted in its working document for the CSA, that the timetable for this measure was unrealistic. The Independent Observer recommended the adoption of a sequenced and realistic action plan, taking into account time and budget constraints.

<sup>19</sup> The movements often said that they were not sufficiently involved in the development of the bill and, in June, again asked the CSA to be more involved. In 2019, their representatives participated in drafting the bill. At the June CSA, the government announced that hearings with the movements and other Malian parties (e.g., *collectivités territoriales* members in the north, etc.) were planned to improve the text and anticipate certain implementation problems, without further delaying the creation of the territorial police and the vote on the law.

<sup>20</sup> No progress has been made on the other two measures either, but the deadlines set by the parties have not expired.

<sup>21</sup> See the Independent Observer's Dec. 2020 report, Annex I, on specific observations.

<sup>22</sup> In Chapter 14, Article 46, the agreement provides for the creation of an International Commission of Inquiry to investigate all war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, sexual crimes and other serious violations of international law, human rights, and humanitarian law throughout Mali. This commission was established on Jan. 19, 2018, by the U.N. Secretary-General and submitted its report on June 26, 2020.

In December 2020, the Interregional Consultative Council (CCI) for the Northern Development Zone, tasked with managing and pooling resources for the SSD-RN, was created, with its members appointed by ministerial decree.<sup>23</sup> In addition, in April the FDD steering committee met for the second time since its creation in 2018. This time, representatives from the movements participated as observers. At the meeting, the steering committee approved 16 projects with a total budget of 38.45 billion CFA (approx. US \$69 million); nine projects are in the northern regions, four in the center, and three in the south.<sup>24</sup>

None of the projects, however, have been initiated, even as the FDD, established in 2018, holds 61.6 billion CFA (approx. US \$111 million) in funding, according to information shared during a CSA subcommittee meeting on May 19. The movements, while they are now observers, have not been made full members of the FDD steering and management committees, despite repeated calls by the CSA and government commitments to make them so. Further, six months after its creation, the CCI has yet to begin its work.<sup>25</sup> In the same vein, the mediation and the Financial and Technical Partners (PTF) have repeatedly requested from the government information on the state of the FDD's funds (funds spent to date, budget forecasts, resources allocated for 2021 and beyond) and the SSD-RN; these requests have gone unanswered.<sup>26</sup>

### The ‘*relecture*’ of the agreement

When, in February, the former prime minister presented the transitional government’s Plan of Action, the *relecture* (review or revision) of the agreement, along with increasing support for implementation, was cited as a priority.<sup>27</sup> Stemming from recommendations formulated by the 2019 National Inclusive Dialogue, *relecture* emerged as a focus of the transition; yet the details about the definition, scope, or procedures of the *relecture* were unclear, all the more so because the government did not refer to Article 65 of the agreement, which defines the procedures for possible revisions.<sup>28</sup> This ambiguity generated significant uncertainty. In his June presentation to the CSA, the new prime minister affirmed that Article 65 establishes the framework for any revisions. He also emphasized, that core principles covered by Article 1, which enshrines “respect for the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state of Mali, as well as its republican

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<sup>23</sup> Ministerial Order No 2020-3388/MATD-SG of Dec. 31, 2020, naming members of the Inter-Regional Consultative Council of the Northern Region Development Zone.

<sup>24</sup> Title IV of the agreement provides for the creation of a Northern Regions Development Zone, which is to be endowed with (i) an Inter-Regional Advisory Council and (ii) a Special Development Strategy for the Regions of Northern Mali (SSD-RN), financed by a Sustainable Development Fund (FDD). Two bodies manage the FDD: a management committee and a steering committee. See also, the Independent Observer’s December 2020 report.

<sup>25</sup> The standing up of the CCI requires an official launch by the minister of territorial administration, pursuant to Article 2 of Ministerial Order No 2020-3388/MATD-SG of Dec. 31, 2020, which stipulates that the minister shall officially install the CCI. The Ministry of Territorial Administration insists, however, that the launch will not occur until there is a training workshop for CCI members, which had yet to occur as of the writing of this report.

<sup>26</sup> This issue has remained outstanding since 2019. See the Independent Observer’s September 2019 and December 2020 reports (Annex 1, Specific Observations). To date, detailed information is lacking on the state of the FDD’s financial endowment as of 2021.

<sup>27</sup> The prime minister’s proposed plan of action was adopted by the CNT on February 19, 2021. It called for the “diligent review (*relecture*), ownership and implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, resulting from the Algiers Process.”

<sup>28</sup> The new prime minister called for an “intelligent review (*relecture*)” of the agreement; the new president called for “intelligent and efficient implementation.”

form and secular character,” were non-negotiable. Despite the prime minister’s comments, the issue of the revision of the agreement could contribute to an erosion of confidence among the parties.

### Growing public mistrust toward the agreement

Despite the agreement’s contribution to preventing combat between the parties, many Malians perceive the implementation process as removed from the country’s daily realities, and members of the political class and civil society increasingly call the agreement into question. These voices have united in anti-agreement groups, such as the *Front de refus de l’Accord d’Alger*, that call for fundamentally revising or discarding the agreement. On Feb. 6, March 13, and June 16, the *Front* organized rallies in Bamako against the agreement, alleging that it paves the way for the break-up of Mali. Some Malian politicians have taken up similar messages. Indeed, *Mouvement du 5 juin-Rassemblement des forces patriotiques* leaders criticized the agreement at a Feb. 21 rally at the *palais de la culture* in Bamako, as did a member of the CNT whose outspoken criticism of the agreement circulated widely on social media in early July.

During the Independent Observer’s meetings with civil society in Kidal and Ménaka in February and March respectively, several interlocutors expressed deep concern about these developments. They called for the agreement—which they still view as the primary solution to insecurity, the lack of basic services, and national divisions—to be enshrined in law to ensure it won’t be abandoned.

The CSA’s and the parties’ efforts to make implementation more transparent, such as adding women to the committee, holding sessions outside of Bamako, and meeting with representatives from local communities, could potentially help counteract the growing distrust of the implementation process.

## II. Security Provisions of the Agreement: Several Steps Forward, but Big Challenges Await

Between January and July, the parties made progress on some defense and security issues, but the path forward on the most critical, often-postponed issues—especially the future of the DDR process, which lies at the heart of the agreement—remains unclear. In absence of action, the movements continued to organize independent security operations in the north and strengthen their coordination.

### Progress in the accelerated DDR process

During the period of observation, the catch-up (*rattrapage*) phase of accelerated DDR resumed. To recall, *rattrapage* is the process for integrating ex-combatants from the movements who were not integrated in the first wave of accelerated DDR. In total, 422 ex-combatants from the Signatory Movements and non-signatory groups subscribing to the agreement were integrated into the FDS. Their training lasted three months, ending on April 30. In total, nearly 1,750 ex-combatants have now been integrated, meaning that the target of 1,800 integrated combatants, set when accelerated DDR was launched in November 2018, has virtually been met.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In total, 1,747 ex-combatants have been integrated. The 422 ex-combatants were deployed as follows: the National Guard (186) and the Army (236). Initially, the catch-up (*rattrapage*) phase involved 448 ex-combatants, but 26 were no-shows at the time of departure for training.

According to statements in April by FAMa senior staff, the 422 newly integrated soldiers should have joined their assigned units in July. To avoid the problems faced by the first wave of integrated combatants, such as being kidnapped while in route to their units, the *rattrapage* combatants remained in a MINUSMA-built transit camp in Kati while awaiting their deployment. At the CSA in June, the government announced that the newly integrated soldiers would be assigned to FDS units as needed, including outside the northern regions. That announcement is noteworthy because in the first wave of accelerated DDR, through an agreement between the parties, all integrated soldiers were deployed to the north. The movements expressed no objection, and the *rattrapage* combatants' nationwide deployment is now underway.

### Next steps on DDR

In general, the parties lack a common vision for the future of the DDR process after the *rattrapage* phase. The parties will need to clarify how they plan to proceed. In doing so, they will face several persistent, sensitive issues that have long bedeviled implementation. These issues include establishing quotas for the integration of ex-combatants from the movements into the FDS and in civil service, as well as attributing ranks and defining the role of ex-combatants in the chain of command. At the CSA in June, the mediation pressed the parties to resolve these issues at a new high-level decision-making meeting on defense and security issues.

As the next steps in comprehensive DDR remain to be defined, socioeconomic reintegration—the process for those ex-combatants wishing to enter civilian life outside of the public sector—also faces obstacles. To date, the parties have not been able to agree to an approach to reintegration.<sup>30</sup> The December 2020 roadmap featured a pilot project for the reintegration of roughly 1,800 ex-combatants, to be jointly funded by the government, the World Bank, and MINUSMA.<sup>31</sup> But, as of July, the parties have been unable to agree on the project's procedures and framework.<sup>32</sup> Reintegration is, as a general matter, rarely discussed among the parties.

More broadly, as the Independent Observer has previously highlighted, the DDR process remains interwoven with progress on political reform. The movements continue to insist that steps forward on defense and security issues be linked to changes in Mali's political system, most significantly the enhanced representation of northerners in national institutions. The two issues are deeply intertwined and remain the parties' priority during the transition.

### The movements' strengthened cooperation

In 2018, the movements began to launch independent security operations separate from the FDS and the mechanisms in the agreement, starting with the CMA's Operation *Acharachou* in the Kidal region. Independent operations subsequently expanded (e.g., in 2019 *Acharachou* was extended to

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<sup>30</sup> The National DDR Commission (CN-DDR) has pre-registered possible candidates for socioeconomic reintegration. The CN-DDR holds that there are 44,143 potential candidates. See the Independent Observer's Dec. 2020 report.

<sup>31</sup> The pilot phase, to be conducted between April and October 2021, was to involve 300 ex-combatants from each northern region (Timbuktu, Gao, Kidal, Menaka, and Taoudenit) as well as the area around Mopti, and focused particularly on those declared permanently unfit for integration into the FDS.

<sup>32</sup> Despite a workshop on March 18 and 19 to define the procedures and selection process, there remains no agreed-upon plan. At the June CSA session, the parties recommitted to finding a solution so the project can go forward.

Timbuktu), and other movements, both signatory and non-signatory groups alike, also initiated similar operations in areas under their control.<sup>33</sup>

For the time being, the FDS remain largely on the sidelines of these operations. While local authorities and the FDS are, as a general matter, kept informed about the operations (as are international forces), whether they participate appears to depend on the local context. For example, in 2019 the FDS refused to participate in *Acharachou* in Timbuktu, but in 2020-21 they supported the initiative *Ménaka sans armes*.

Alongside these independent security operations are other efforts by the movements to work together, such as the agreement in March between the CMA and the Platform to coordinate militarily in the Timbuktu region.<sup>34</sup> Through the “Anefis 3” agreement in January between the CMA and the two wings of the Platform, local and regional efforts to prevent clashes appear so far successful. In the same vein, the Permanent Strategic Framework (CSP), created by the movements in April, aims to reconcile communities and enhance economic and security cooperation in the north.<sup>35</sup>

As part of these efforts, the movements have regularly showcased technical and sophisticated weaponry during ceremonies and parades, one example being the event on April 9 organized to mark the alignment of the *Front Populaire de l’Azawad* and a part of the *Mouvement pour le Salut de l’Azawad-Chamanamas* with the High Council for the Unity of Azawad. Such demonstrations of force would violate regulations, agreed upon by the parties in the CTS, regarding the movement of arms and convoys. In June, the MINUSMA force commander, who is also the president of the CTS, wrote to CTS members reminding them of their commitments on these issues.<sup>36</sup>

The movements’ independent security initiatives and increased coordination have reduced tensions among them and improved security for the local population. Yet the operations themselves highlight the security vacuum in the north. Indeed, that vacuum stems in part from the delays in the implementation of the security provisions of the agreement. The movements’ increasingly expansive operations reinforce doubts about their commitment to ultimately disarm and join the FDS. Unresolved, those doubts may in time undermine trust among the parties and further slow the pace of implementation.<sup>37</sup>

### Reconstituted battalions and other key components of the defense and security pillar

The reconstituted battalions (BATFAR), composed of both ex-movement and FAMa soldiers, are now in place in Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu. A company also has been sent to Ménaka. In Gao, Timbuktu, and Ménaka, they contribute to security operations. The third company of the Kidal battalion, which had been delayed in Gao since February principally because of opposition from the CMA, arrived in Kidal in late June. The battalion, now fully staffed, should soon begin operations.

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<sup>33</sup> For instance, in 2020, the Platform and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad-Daoussahak launched the *Menaka sans armes* operation; the CPA led Operation *Taflist* in Tonka in the region of Timbuktu; and in 2021, the CMA created a “defense and security zone” in Gourma.

<sup>34</sup> Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, May 2021, para. 16, p.4.

<sup>35</sup> Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, June 1, 2021, paras. 16 and 22, pp.4, 5. On the basis of the April framework, the Platform and the CMA subsequently signed a formal agreement in Rome on May 6.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from the MINUSMA force commander to CTS members on *Operation Farrier* and CTS decisions on the movement of weapons and convoys, No 2021/017/CTS/SEC, June 14, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, June 1, 2021, paras. 16 and 22, pp.4, 5.

As the Independent Observer indicated in its previous report, numerous problems persist in terms of the accommodations, compensation, and command structure of the BATFARs; generally speaking, their conditions are inferior to those of other FAMa units deployed in the same area. Both the U.N. secretary-general (in his June report) and the CSA (in March, June, and July) have emphasized the need to fully stand up the reconstituted battalions.<sup>38</sup>

Investing in the BATFARs is crucial because they potentially offer a double benefit—strengthening confidence and collaboration between the parties and contributing to security in the north. Rather than be considered as isolated and temporary arrangement, as seems to be perspective of certain actors, the battalions could serve as prototypes for a fully inclusive, reconstituted FDS.

### *Opportunities to Accelerate the Implementation Process*

The upcoming period offers multiple opportunities to accelerate implementation. Possible actions include:

- **Build on the commitments made in Kayes.** During the CSA meeting in Kayes in March, the parties acknowledged chronic challenges and committed to address them. Among the key steps identified were developing a more constructive, systematic approach to implementation; resolving certain long-pending issues; acting on urgent issues; increasing inclusivity; and reinforcing public communication about the agreement.<sup>39</sup>
- **Present a plan to implement the principle of the “increased representation of northern populations within national institutions” (Article 6 of the agreement).** The parties should articulate a plan for how to increase the presence of northerners in national bodies. As of June, they were discussing the provisions of the agreement that could be transposed into the constitution (although momentum appears to have slowed since then) as well as the completion of the administrative and electoral redistricting process in the new northern regions and *cercles*. These discussions should be finalized as part of broader efforts to implement Article 6.
- **Definitively resolve the longstanding issues of quotas and chain of command, define a plan for the next steps in DDR, and continue to build a fully reconstituted FDS.** Given the transitional authorities’ commitment to restoring national government authority in central and northern Mali, the deployment of the reconstituted FDS (the BATFARs) should be matched by the return of additional government officials and services, which would

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<sup>38</sup> Report of the U.N. Secretary-General on the situation in Mali, June 1, 2021, para. 92, p.15. The CSA’s statement following its meeting on June 29 reads: “The participants committed to intensifying efforts to complete the implementation of remaining commitments, drawing more consistently on the availability of support from the international community to stabilize the situation in Mali. In this regard, they pledged to strive to implement the following actions as a matter of priority: fully standing up, by the next CSA session, the reconstituted battalions in Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal ... ”.

<sup>39</sup> See the final statement of the CSA’s March session; see also, the Independent Observer’s December 2020 report.

further contribute to building a positive dynamic in the implementation process.<sup>40</sup> Fully operationalizing the BATFARs is critical and is underway.

- **Build on the opportunities offered by women’s participation in the CSA to increase further the transparency, inclusivity, and accountability of the implementation process, thereby increasing public confidence in the agreement.** The new female members of the CSA are key allies in reducing the growing perception of an implementation process far from most Malians’ daily reality and in increasing the population’s understanding of the agreement and its benefits.
- **Mali’s partners, who remain highly engaged, can provide enhanced support to relaunch implementation.** The mediation could focus attention on key outstanding issues and actively assist the parties in holding the next high-level decision-making meeting, with the aim of reaching agreement on a plan for next steps as part of a comprehensive DDR process. Intensified dialogue between the CSA and the PTFs, a more proactive role for MINUSMA as the head of the CSA’s secretariat, and a larger role for Mali’s neighbors, who serve as vice presidents of the CSA, could also bolster implementation. Additional international support would be beneficial for all.

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<sup>40</sup> See the prime minister’s remarks to the cabinet on June 13, 2021, broadcasted on WhatsApp. The CSA’s statement following its session in March listed among its priorities: “Resuming consultations at the decision-making level on defense and security issues, initiated on Feb. 9, 2021, and reactivating the CTS and the EMOVs, in particular to complete and close the accelerated DDR process, notably by deploying the MOC’s third company to Kidal and standing up the reconstituted army battalions already deployed in Kidal, Timbuktu, Gao, and Ménaka as well as the consensual launch of new phase of DDR.” See also, the Independent Observer’s Dec. 2020 report.