

DETERIORO

MALI: Clashes between the armed groups jeopardise the peace agreement

Armed clashes continued to be reported in the northern part of the country in September between different groups that signed the peace agreement in June 2015 and broke the cessation of hostilities agreement achieved last August. The most prominent events included a clash in the region of Kidal on 16 September between the pro-government Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) and the former rebels of the Coalition of Movements of Azawad (CMA) that left about a dozen fighters dead. From 18 to 26 September, fighting was also reported between both groups over territorial control of the border villages of Inekawatane and Khalil. According to a statement issued by GATIA, the CMA was expelled from the villages. The international mediation team led by Algeria, which also includes representatives of the UN, EU, AU and regional bloc ECOWAS, expressed deep concern about the deterioration of the peace agreement and threatened to impose sanctions on those responsible for the fighting. (AFP, 17/09/2016; RFI, 18/09/2016)

SYRIA: Fragile hopes of reviving the negotiations are disrupted by the grave deterioration of the conflict and the unprecedented offensive against eastern Aleppo

The month of September began with timid expectations about the possibility of an agreement promoted by the United States and Russia aimed at reviving the cessation of hostilities agreement reached last February, in addition to facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid to the population, which has been severely affected by the conflict. However, the agreement fell apart a few days after it was implemented, leading to an unprecedented escalation of violence in Aleppo that buried any hopes of resuming the negotiations. In this context, at the end of the month the special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, Staffan de Mistura, called on the UN Security Council as it met in an emergency session to adopt the necessary measures to encourage a new cessation of hostilities agreement and prevent Aleppo from being reduced to ashes. The diplomat called for measures to secure a truce, to establish 48-hour weekly breaks so aid could be delivered and water and electrical supply could be repaired and to allow medical evacuation for emergency cases. In early September, before the situation deteriorated to the levels reached at the end of the month, the Syrian opposition meeting at the High Negotiations Committee (HNC) had revealed a plan for a transition in the country in a document entitled "A vision for Syria". This road map, which was presented in London to the Friends of Syria Group by the general coordinator of the HNC, Riyad Hijab, provides for an initial six-month cessation of hostilities period in which negotiations would be held with Bashar Assad, using the Geneva Communiqué of 2012 as a reference. Later, in a second phase that would last 18 months, Assad would have to relinquish power to a transitional government with full executive powers, senior officials accused of committing atrocities would be removed and work would be done to draft a new Constitution. In the third phase of the proposal, amendments to the Constitution would be agreed on, the results of a national dialogue would be implemented and elections would be held under UN supervision. (UN News, 25/09/16; BBC and El País, 07/09/16; The Guardian, 11/09/16)

SOMALIA: The election is again postponed and Al-Shabaab threatens attacks during the process

A new National Leadership Forum (NLF) meeting was held in Mogadishu and a new inclusive road map, with legislative and presidential elections in October, was agreed to. Leaders from the regions of Puntland, Jubaland, Galmudug and the South West state, together with the presidents of the Government and the Federal Parliament, pledged that the election teams from each region would implement the process. In addition, they agreed that women would represent at least 30 per cent of the Upper and Lower houses and that the number of seats in the Upper House would be 54. Furthermore, they called on key

actors and the elder leaders from the Hiraan and Middle Shabelle regions to agree to participate in the current dialogue process. However, Somaliland's participation continues to be up in the air and the armed group Ahlu Sunna WalJama'a, which is based in Dhusamareb, the capital of Galgudug, has rejected the conclusions of the NLF and also warned that it is against the appointment of the new administration in Adado, in nearby Galmudug. Nevertheless, at the end of the month the Government decided to postpone until October 30 the indirect parliamentary elections scheduled for September 24 due to disputes over the process for selecting the candidates, and consequently also postponed the presidential elections to November 30. Accusations of vote-buying and corruption have been reported, and in the case of the presidential elections there is concern that only candidates with significant financial resources will be able to run for president. (Shabelle Media, 05, 17/09/16; Garowe Online, 13/09/16)

SOUTH SUDAN: Riek Machar announces the resumption of armed conflict

The peace process in South Sudan has suffered severe setbacks since the clashes reported last July in the capital, Juba, which led to the expulsion of SPLA-IO forces from the capital and the end of the term of office of the vice president of the Transitional Government of National Unity, SPLA-IO leader Riek Machar. Due to these events, Machar, the rebel leader and former vice president, left the country and headed for the DR Congo, then later travelled to the capital of Sudan. On 25 September, Machar issued a statement from Khartoum that called for resuming the war against the government of Salva Kiir, declaring an end to the peace agreement signed between Kiir's government and the forces of the SPLA-IO signed in August 2015. The governments of Sudan and Ethiopia, which border with South Sudan, have said that they would not allow Machar to use their territory. The increasing destabilisation of the peace process led representatives of the UN Security Council to travel to Juba on 2 September to discuss the new regional protection force, which will be composed of 4,000 additional peacekeeping troops to the UN mission in the country (UNMISS). The government of Salva Kiir, which initially accepted the deployment, later blocked it, sparking threats from the United States that it would apply pressure for a UN weapons embargo if Juba continued to block it and impede the efforts of the UN peacekeepers. The violence reported in the country following the crisis that broke out in July displaced over 185,000 people, according to UNHCR spokesperson Leo Dobbs. (Reuters, 3/09/2016; Sudan Tribune, 16, 23/09/2016; BBC, 16/09/2016)

ALERTA

AFGHANISTAN: Government signs peace agreement with Hezb-i-Islami, second insurgence organisation in the country

The Afghan Government has signed a peace agreement with the armed opposition group Hezb-i-Islami, led by the warlord Gulbudin Hekmatyar. This armed group is the second most important in the country. The UN and the US Embassy welcomed the agreement, but several human rights organisations expressed their concerns, highlighting the role played by Hekmatyar during the war in the country and the serious human rights violations he is responsible for, among which it is worth mentioning indiscriminate bombings against civilian population, the selective killing of intellectuals, enforced disappearances and attacks on women using acid for not wearing the veil. The agreement foresees an amnesty for Hekmatyar, who will be authorised to return to Kabul and participate in the country's political life, as well as the release of prisoners belonging to the armed group. The Government shall cover security costs for the place where the armed group decides to establish its headquarters. The Afghan Government also agreed towards the UN and the US withdrawing the sanctions imposed against Hekmatyar. It is important to recall that a large chunk of the group broke away from the armed faction and joined Hamid Karzai's government without disowning Hekmatyar, and this could provide him with an important political platform. The armed group accepted to disarm, to abide by the Constitution and to

participate in the transitional justice mechanisms. (The New York Times, 22/09/16; The Guardian 22/09/16; The New Yorker, 18/10/16)

COLOMBIA: The FARC and the government sign the peace agreement

After 52 years of war and more than three years of negotiations in Havana, the Colombian government headed by José Manuel Santos and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), led by Rodrigo Londoño, alias “Timochenko”, signed the final peace agreement on 26 September in the Colombian city of Cartagena. The agreement, which had been reached last 24 August, had been previously debated and ratified by the FARC during the 10th National Guerrilla Conference held from 17 to 23 September in El Diamante, a remote location in the Llanos del Yarí. The historic signing of the peace agreement in Cartagena was witnessed by the international community, represented by 2,500 guests and around 15 heads of state and headed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who congratulated Colombia on the historic step towards peace in the country. The main support for the process initially came from the European Union, which announced that it would remove the FARC from its list of terrorist organisations. US Secretary of State John Kerry also announced that Washington would consider removing the FARC from its list of terrorist organisations to the extent that the “facts” change after the peace agreement is signed. The agreement must be ratified by the Colombian people in a referendum announced by the government on 30 August, which will be held on 2 October. If approved, it will put a definitive end to the armed conflict involving the largest guerrilla group in the country. Former president and current Senator Álvaro Uribe and his party, the Democratic Centre, have begun a campaign to promote the “no” vote in the aforementioned peace referendum. The National Liberation Army (ELN) announced a unilateral ceasefire from 30 September to 5 October to help the Colombian people to go and vote. Moreover, ELN leader Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista, alias “Gabino”, reported that his organisation will respect the Transitional Local Zones for Normalisation (ZVTNs) agreed to between the government and the FARC, where the rebels will meet prior to laying down their weapons and demobilising. (Infolatam/EFE, 1, 4, 23, 25-27/09/2016)

CYRPUS: The negotiations intensify, with questions raised about the possibilities of an agreement before the year’s end

The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders met seven times between 23 August and 14 September in order to make headway in the process prior to the UN General Assembly and as part of the intensified negotiations in recent months. The leaders of both communities issued a joint statement after the meeting on 14 September in which they stressed that progress had been made on issues linked to the chapters on governance and power-sharing, the economy, property and EU issues, while also recognising that substantive disagreements remained. In the statement, both leaders expressed their willingness to continue and intensify their efforts in the coming months in order to reach an agreement in 2016. Moreover, both local leaders sat down with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 25 September in a meeting that the latter described as productive, praising their joint efforts to intensify the process. However, some media outlets pointed to the glaring discrepancies that remained, as well as Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades’ rejection of the schedule proposed by Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci. (ONU, Cyprus Mail, Hürriyet, Reuters, 1-30/09/16)

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: National dialogue begins between the Government and part of the political opposition amid growing demonstrations by the opposition

The national dialogue was launched by the Government to find a solution to the grave political and social situation caused by the end of President Joseph Kabila’s mandate in

December and growing concern that he may attempt to remain in power for a third Presidential term. Several parties forming the ruling coalition and some opposition figures and civil society groups are involved in the national dialogue, notably Vital Kamerhe, the leader of the Union pour la Nation Congolaise (UNC) party. Kamerhe, who signed an agreement on September 14 on behalf of the political opposition that participated in the dialogue, pointed out that there is a serious political crisis in the country that will only become worse if presidential elections are not held and it is thus urgent to find a political solution. In this regard, the agreement establishes that presidential, national and provincial elections will be held on the same date, and if additional funds are made available, local elections will also be held on the same date. The agreement is a huge victory for Joseph Kabila, as it allows him to legitimately continue in power, since the Constitution prohibits him from running for a third term. Kabila has been president of the country since 2001, following the murder of his father Laurent Kabila, and after winning elections in 2006 and 2011, which were plagued by numerous irregularities. The coalition has stated that it will not participate in the dialogue unless political prisoners are released and legal actions against the opposition leader Moïse Katumbi are suspended. Katumbi is the former president of the Katanga region and was tried in absentia in June for alleged fraud and sentenced to three years in prison. (Enough Project, 31/08/16; BBC, AFP, 01/09/16; Radio Maendeleo, 12/09/16)

THAILAND (SOUTH): First round of exploratory talks between government and MARA Patani since April end without significant agreements

The latest round of informal talks in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) between the government and MARA Patani, the organisation of six insurgent groups operating in the south of the country, ended without any agreement. It was the first meeting of both parties since the previous round of talks in which the government rejected to sign the terms of reference of the peace process (after they had been agreed on by the respective officials for both parties following months of efforts) and a member was removed from the negotiating panel: General Nakrob Boonbuathong, who according to MARA Patani and several media outlets had the greatest experience and familiarity with the peace process. According to the government, in this new round of talks MARA Patani stated it had no involvement in the spate of attacks witnessed in mid-August (essentially, 12 consecutive attacks at several locations—some tourist-oriented—in eight southern provinces, as well as two bomb blasts that ripped through a hotel in Pattani), affirming its wish to cooperate in ascertaining the circumstances surrounding those events. Indeed, the government insisted anew that there would not be substantive developments in talks until there was a significant drop in or an end to violence among insurgent groups in the south of the country. Along these lines, MARA Patani undertook to review Bangkok's proposal to create a safety or ceasefire zone to allow it to assess whether MARA Patani has any influence over levels of violence witnessed in the south of the country. According to the government, this proposal is consistent with several proposals put forward by a number of women's organisations in the south of the country, such as Women's Agenda for Peace, an umbrella group formed by around 23 NGOs. In this respect, MARA Patani stated that it was open to receiving proposals in relation to the establishment of safety zones from civil society organisations. Despite no substantial developments being made, both parties undertook to hold exploratory talks, although no date was agreed for the next meeting. Likewise, according to a number of journalist sources, on the occasion of Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak's visit to Thailand in early September, both governments addressed the circumstances surrounding the peace process. (Guardian, Benar News, 01/09/16; The Nation, ABC Online, 03/08/16; Bangkok Post, 20/09/16)

AVANCE**MYANMAR: Panglong-21 Peace Conference unites Government and virtually all armed groups in country**

The Panglong-21 Peace Conference, convened by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, was held, bringing together the Government and virtually all of the active armed opposition groups in the country, including those that did not sign the national ceasefire agreement, with the exception of the groups AA, MNDAA and TNLA. The conference, which lasted four days, took place in Naypidaw, the country's capital. At this conference, the opening ceremony of which was attended by 1,400 people, including participants, diplomats and guests, there were 75 Government representatives, 75 members of parliament, 50 representatives from the Armed Forces, 200 from the ethnic armed groups, 150 from political parties, 50 from groups defending ethnic minorities, 50 from other groups and 50 observers. Women's rights organisations were not present as such with a seat at the negotiation table, but were present as observers; however, they requested a greater participation. The UN Secretary-General, who attended the conference, called for a 30% representation of women at all levels of negotiation. The Conference concluded without the adoption of any resolution and was considered as the first step towards achieving peace in the country with all armed groups. Several voices highlighted that the main success of this conference was having representatives of all sectors sitting at the same table, including groups that had not taken part in the signing of the ceasefire agreement. Nevertheless, the armed group UWSA abandoned the conference on the second day, denouncing the discrimination against ethnic minorities. It is expected that a second round of the Panglong-21 Peace Conference will take place within the Political Dialogue Framework to discuss several points on the political agenda. (The Irrawaddy, 2, 3 & 5/9/16)

TURKEY (SOUTHEAST): The government authorises a family visit to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the pro-Kurdish party HDP urges the government and the PKK to silence their weapons

On 11 September, Mehmet Öcalan was authorised to visit his brother, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, as part of the Muslim festival Eid al-Adha. The end of Öcalan's isolation is one of the main demands of the Kurdish movement, which in previous weeks had intensified its demands and protests in that regard, denouncing Öcalan's alleged health problems. Moreover, in late September a hunger strike began involving 50 people, including various MPs, until they were authorised to receive visits from their lawyers, family members or a political delegation. In April, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture had visited Öcalan, although the last authorised visit by a Kurdish delegation was in April 2015, as part of the failed peace process. The last visit he received from his family was in October 2014 and the last time he saw his lawyers was in July 2011. According to Mehmet Öcalan, the PKK leader was in good health. Abdullah Öcalan told him that neither side could win the war and that if the state was ready, they could implement "projects" in six months. In late September, the co-leader of the pro-Kurdish party HDP, Selahattin Demirtas, urged the government and the PKK to silence their weapons. Demirtas said that he was not referring to giving up or turning in the weapons, but to silencing them by means of a ceasefire. In September, an HDP delegation met in northern Iraq with leaders of the region, including President Massoud Barzani. Demirtas said they hoped that Barzani would exert efforts to promote the resumption of the peace process. However, during the month the government stressed again that there would be no peace process with the PKK. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım stated that the PKK had lost its chance and that the PKK did not have a Kurdish problem, but the Kurdish population had a PKK problem. During the month, the government announced a socio-economic plan for the southeast, to include the construction of infrastructure, like new homes and hospitals, economic investment, including by creating new factories and providing incentives to job creation, the supply of food and clothing and other actions. The first phase is planned to invest \$3.4 million in seven districts (Sur, Sirmak,

Silopi, Cizre, Yükesokova and Nusaybin). This is part of the government's focus on the situation of the region that excludes the Kurdish movement. (Hürriyet, Firat, Rudaw, 1-30/09/16)

UKRAINE (EAST): New ceasefire and agreement to withdraw forces

Progress was made in September. First, a new ceasefire related to the conflict in eastern Ukraine began in mid-September. The leaders of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk announced unilateral ceasefires on 14 September. The next day, it was announced that the Ukrainian government backed the start of the new truce. However, this was the second ceasefire that month, after a truce reached between the parties to coincide with the beginning of the new school year entered into force in the early hours of 1 September. However, in the days that followed this truce in early September, the parties denounced casualties caused by ceasefire violations, including in areas around Maryinka. Bombardments near the city of Mariupol were also reported. Meanwhile, the OSCE announced the achievement of a framework decision on the disengagement of forces and equipment, signed on 21 September by the representatives of Ukraine and Russia in the Trilateral Contact Group and by the representatives of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk after months of discussion in the working group on security. According to the OSCE, this is a new instrument to improve the situation around the line of contact, given the failure to implement previous commitments. The new agreement covers the initial withdrawal of forces and equipment from three areas (Zolote, Petrivske and Stanytsia Luhanska), to be followed by other areas. The OSCE indicated that the “silence of weapons” along the line of contact is necessary to make political progress. As part of the working group on humanitarian issues, six detainees were released on 17 September. Furthermore, the working group on political issues addressed the subject of methods for local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk and amnesty-related matters. (OSCE, 1-30/09/16)

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