

# SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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## CHAD'S EX-RULER GRANTED LEAVE FROM PRISON

Chad's former ruler, President Hissene Habre, has been granted temporary 60-day leave from prison on humanitarian grounds following concerns over the high risk of coronavirus infection in jail. In his absence, the Senegalese prison is being repurposed to house detained coronavirus patients in quarantine.

Mr Habre's temporary release is unprecedented. In 2015 he was convicted of crimes against humanity by a Senegalese court. Habre faced a number of high-profile charges and was subsequently convicted of rape, sexual slavery, and sanctioning of mass murder in the landmark trial.

Habre ruled Chad from 1982 to 1990, his government having allegedly seized power through CIA backing, have having received substantial support from the US throughout his time in power. Victims of torture during the Habre era had welcomed the conviction as a turning point for the country.

The case was also noteworthy since Mr Habre was tried in Senegal, and not in the International Criminal Court in the Hague. Although the court was partly funded by the European Union and the US, many welcomed the case's hearing in Africa.

Activists have since been advocating for a permanent African Court of Justice to be established. This would allow Africans accused of

war crimes to be tried and convicted in Africa.

## CHAD WILL NOT LONGER PARTICIPATE IN REGIONAL WAR AGAINST ARMED FORCES

The current President of Chad, Idriss Deby, has stated that Chad's military forces will no longer participate in the regional struggle against armed insurgent groups outside of the country's borders. Currently, armed groups are active in the Lake Chad region and the Sahel region.

The decision to withdraw Chadian troops is reflective of the government's frustration at the failure of the country's allies to do more in the fight against armed insurgent groups. Multiple insurgent and extremist groups have arisen throughout the war on terror, including groups such as Boko Haram. In 2015 the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) - including Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Benin - was formed to insurgent groups in the Lake Chad area. Likewise, the G5-Sahel group - including Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad - was established to fight groups in the Sahel region.

The Chadian military maintains a relatively high presence in the region, having recently concluded a month-long offensive against Boko Haram during which 52 army soldiers were killed. Deby has openly expressed Chad's frustration of their regional allies for failing to do more, insisting that Chad is carrying the majority of the burden in the fight against insurgent groups such as Boko Haram.

The military has stated that insurgent forces which were expelled from Chad have advanced deeper into Niger and Nigeria. Deby has noted that Chadian military forces will forcibly vacate seized Boko Haram bases by April 22, irrespective of whether other regional military forces have moved in or not. The consequences of Chad's decision in respect to the security and stability of the region will be seen in the coming months.



Idriss Deby – GovernmentZA (flickr.com)

## MALIAN ELECTION MARRED BY VIOLENCE

In late March, citizens of Mali headed to the polls for the 2020 Malian parliamentary elections to vote in new MPs to the country's 147-seat parliament. However, a shroud of violence and kidnappings has marred the elections.

The election, which took place on March 29, was long delayed due to security concerns. Since 2012, Mali has been engulfed in a series of conflicts carried out by rebels in Northern Mali, who have taken up arms against the government in the pursuit of increased autonomy. Local election observers voiced concerns surrounding the security of the elections, particularly in the volatile northern regions of the country.

A string of incidents were reported during the run up to the elections. The Citizen Electoral Observation in Mali (COCEM) group reported that several village chiefs, election officials, and one observer was kidnapped before the election took

place. Moreover, several polling stations were ransacked, and electoral officials reported death threats being made against them. Nine people were also killed when their vehicle struck a landmine in central Mali on the day of the election. The Monday after the election, an army vehicle hit a roadside bomb, causing 3 deaths and 3 wounded.

Most notably on March 25, four days before the election was scheduled, opposition leader Soumaila Cisse was kidnapped. Cisse was campaigning in the Timbuktu region, when he was abducted by unidentified gunmen. The 70 year-old Cisse is a former minister of finance, who has run for the Malian presidency several times. His abduction is the first in Mali for a politician of his rank. Five people who were kidnapped along with Cisse were released a week later, and insist that Cisse is doing well under captivity. The Malian government welcomed the release of the five hostages, and insisted that it was a productive step in the negotiations for Cisse's release. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which met in early April for the first time in four weeks, called for the "swift liberation" of Mr. Cisse.

The UNSC also condemned the attack of April 6 on a military base in Bamba that killed 25 Malian soldiers. The incident occurred when a group of armed men conducted an attack on the military base in the north of Mali. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

Humanitarian groups and NGOs hoped that the elections would stem the tide of violence in Mali, however subsequent attacks highlight the continuing deteriorating state of security and democratic conditions in the Sahel region. In 2012 Malian soldiers staged a coup d'état to remove President Amadou Toumani Toure, who had been in power since 2002. In 2013 the French military entered Mali to remove the military from power, and push out Islamist militants from the centre of the country. Large areas of Mali remain outside of state control.

## CORONAVIRUS AFRICA UPDATE

World Bank: The World Bank has announced that Sub-Saharan Africa will experience its first recession in 25 years as a consequence of the pandemic.

Democratic Republic of the Congo: The country is dealing with multiple disease outbreaks at once. Just days before the Ebola epidemic was declared over, WHO confirmed a new case has been detected in the country. The DRC is now simultaneously battling Coronavirus, Ebola, and a measles outbreak.

South Africa: In late March, the country went into a nationwide lockdown. The lockdown has some of the toughest restrictions in the world. Exercising outside and sales of alcohol and cigarettes have been banned, among other restrictions.

Many have praised President Cyril Ramaphosa for acting decisively when many other countries were slow to act. However, the government has also been criticised for its lack of oversight regarding the police and military, who have reportedly been abusing their powers. There have been reports of state forces beating and even firing upon civilians in the capital Johannesburg.

The nationwide lockdown has been extended until the end of April, leading many to question how severe its economic consequences will be.

Border Closures: Many migrant workers are stranded in Niger as countries close their borders in an attempt to restrict the outbreak. Niger is considered a corridor for many West African workers travelling to Algeria, Libya, or even Europe for work. Quarantine camps are being set up, but with daytime temperatures sometimes exceeding 50 degrees Celsius, many consider them to be unsafe.