

UNHCR
Centre for Documentation and Research



WRITENET Paper No. 14/2000

MALI - NIGER: FRAGILE STABILITY

By Carolyn Norris

Independent Researcher, London

May 2001

**WriteNet is a Network of Researchers and Writers on
Human Rights, Forced Migration, Ethnic and Political Conflict**

**WriteNet is a Subsidiary of Practical Management (UK)
E-mail: writenet@gn.apc.org**

THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED MAINLY ON THE BASIS OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE INFORMATION, ANALYSIS AND COMMENT. ALL SOURCES ARE CITED. THE PAPER IS NOT, AND DOES NOT PURPORT TO BE, EITHER EXHAUSTIVE WITH REGARD TO CONDITIONS IN THE COUNTRY SURVEYED, OR CONCLUSIVE AS TO THE MERITS OF ANY PARTICULAR CLAIM TO REFUGEE STATUS OR ASYLUM. THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE PAPER ARE THOSE OF THE AUTHOR AND ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF WRITENET OR UNHCR.

ISSN 1020-8429

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	<u>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u>	1
2.	<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	2
3.	<u>THE EXODUS OF PEOPLE FROM NORTHERN MALI AND NORTHERN NIGER</u>	3
3.1.	<u>THE CAUSES OF THE REBELLION</u>	3
3.2.	<u>THE OUTBREAK OF THE REBELLION</u>	5
3.3.	<u>THE RESPONSE OF THE MALIAN AND NIGERIESE GOVERNMENTS</u>	6
4.	<u>PEACE AGREEMENTS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION</u>	8
4.1.	<u>DISARMAMENT AND THE REINTEGRATION OF FORMER REBEL COMBATANTS</u>	9
4.2.	<u>THE RETURN OF THE REFUGEES</u>	11
5.	<u>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TOWARDS INSTABILITY</u>	13
5.1.	<u>THE SLOW PACE OF DECENTRALIZATION</u>	13
5.2.	<u>THE RISKS OF A RETURN TO VIOLENCE</u>	16
6.	<u>INTERNATIONAL AID AND NGO ACTION</u>	20
6.1.	<u>THE LARGE-SCALE, IF BELATED, ASSISTANCE</u>	20
6.2.	<u>CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS - THE FIRST-HAND VIEWS OF DEVELOPMENT WORKERS</u>	23
6.2.1.	<i>The Provision of Water</i>	24
6.2.2.	<i>Education</i>	25
6.2.3.	<i>Health Needs</i>	26
6.3.	<u>THE DANGERS INHERENT IN WITHDRAWAL</u>	28
7.	<u>CONCLUSION</u>	29
8.	<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	31

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
CP 2500, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

E-mail: cdr@unhcr.org

Web Site: <http://www.unhcr.org>

1. Executive Summary

During the past three decades Mali and Niger have experienced substantial movements of population. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Tuaregs, have left their home areas to seek refuge in other regions of their own country or in neighbouring countries. These movements were caused by droughts in the 1970s and 1980s and the conflict, which from 1990 brought armed rebels into confrontation with the Malian and Nigerien security forces.

In 1992 in Mali and three years later in Niger, peace agreements were reached and the repatriation of refugees was able to take place. Ten years after the start of the rebellions, first in Mali and then in Niger, there is now some stability in the north of these two countries. The local populations in these regions have opted for economic development and now seem unwilling to take up arms again. However, there are frustrations, which remain as a result of promises not kept by the central governments of the two countries and the misuse of international aid money, which was diverted to projects and activities, which did not directly benefit the target populations.

The promise of decentralization, which allowed a compromise to be reached between the rebels' federalist demands and the desire of the states to ensure their territorial integrity, has been met either belatedly, in Mali, or to date not at all in Niger. Also, large parts of the population, and in particular numerous ex-combatants, are still waiting to see some real improvements in their material well-being. It was this hope of a better life, along with a hope that their rights and specific needs would be respected, which led some to take up arms at the beginning of the 1990s, and if these aims are not met there is a risk that some will revert to the use of violence.

This paper traces some of the indications of future problems, based on recent interviews specifically carried out with people who have direct and recent experience of working in the affected areas, as well as information from other sources. Recent attacks by armed gangs are indicative of the residual violence in the northern and eastern parts of the two countries. In late December 2000 a group led by a former Tuareg rebel took hostage some Malian soldiers. In Niger, there are new waves of people fleeing towards the towns or to neighbouring countries because of the current threat of drought and food shortages in various parts of the country.

The international community must take into account the potential danger and must pursue its efforts in the field to ensure that decentralization, which has arrived in Mali and which might be on the horizon in Niger, brings with it the promised development which convinced the rebel fronts to renounce violence and lay down their weapons for good. For the moment, most of the affected populations see the rebellion as something in the past and that the priority is now to develop their region. But it must be remembered that all the former players in the armed conflict, especially the ex-rebels themselves and the former self-defence militias, have retained a large proportion of their arms. If the much-awaited economic developments do not arrive soon, the risk of renewed violence cannot be ruled out.

2. Introduction

During the past three decades, Mali and Niger have experienced substantial movements of population. Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Tuaregs, but also Arabs in Mali and Toubous in Niger, have left their home areas to seek refuge in other regions of their own country or in neighbouring countries. The reasons for the movements were two-fold: the ferocious droughts of the 1970s and 1980s which decimated the animal herds of these essentially nomadic people; and the conflict which from 1990 brought armed rebels, in particular Tuaregs, into confrontation with the Malian and Nigerien security forces.

In 1995 an extensive voluntary repatriation operation of refugees originating from Mali and Niger began, under the direction of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This was possible after peace agreements, completed in Mali in 1992 and in Niger three years later, between the respective governments and the various armed factions.

Ten years after the start of the rebellions, first in Mali and then in Niger, there is now some stability in the north of these two countries. The local populations in these regions have opted for economic development and now seem unwilling to take up arms again. However, there are frustrations, which remain as a result of promises not kept by the central governments of the two countries and the misuse of international aid money, which was diverted to projects, and activities, which did not directly benefit the target populations.

The promise of decentralization, which allowed a compromise to be reached between the rebels' federalist demands and the desire of the states to ensure their territorial integrity, has been met either belatedly or to date not at all. In Mali decentralization began in 1999 but the process is suffering from a lack of economic resources, whereas in Niger local municipal elections are scheduled for the coming months though the precise date has not yet been set. Apart from a few leading Tuaregs who have found ministerial posts or other comfortable positions in Bamako (the capital of Mali) or Niamey (the capital of Niger), large parts of the population, and in particular numerous ex-combatants, are still waiting to see some real improvements in their material well-being. It was this hope of a better life, along with a hope that their rights and specific needs would be respected, which led some to take up arms at the beginning of the 1990s and if these aims are not met there is a risk that some will revert to the use of violence.

This frustration is not imaginary. Attacks by armed gangs are indicative of the residual violence in the northern and eastern parts of the two countries. If the perception that they are being ignored by central government grows, the discontent in the northern and eastern populations could result in isolated attacks against the army. This could lead to reprisals against the civilian populations and the flow of refugees would start again. There are already some signs, which give cause for concern, for example, the group led by a former Tuareg rebel, which took hostage some Malian soldiers in late December 2000. In Niger, there are new waves of people fleeing towards the towns or to neighbouring countries because of the current threat of drought and food shortages in various parts of the country. These all serve to indicate how fragile the current stability is and how vitally important it is that states and international aid agencies help Mali and Niger respond to the frustrations of their northern

and eastern populations if further violence and population movements are to be avoided. To meet this challenge it is essential that strict controls are imposed to ensure that any assistance is used effectively, reaching the people most in need, and that the assistance does not discriminate between those returning, either from exile or internal displacement, and those who remained, as all are equally suffering from the lack of basic infrastructures.

3. The Exodus of People from Northern Mali and Northern Niger

The first large-scale exodus from northern Mali and northern Niger resulted from the two devastating droughts in the 1970s and 1980s destroying the herds, which constitute the livelihood of these nomadic people. Some fled to the outskirts of towns and, divorced from their normal activities, resorted to begging. Many others found refuge in neighbouring Algeria or Libya, which were seen as a wonderful opportunity with good prospects for work. Some young Tuaregs and Moors who had no jobs were recruited as mercenaries by Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi's Islamic League and sent to fight in Chad and Lebanon where they learned to handle weapons. The Tuaregs who went to Algeria and Libya also experienced the modern world, which increased their demands for material gain. A second reason for these nomadic people to flee from their home areas was the insecurity caused by the conflict which set some armed Tuareg, Moor and Toubou groups against the security forces of Mali and Niger in the early 1990s. This rebellion is explored below.

3.1. The Causes of the Rebellion

To understand the reasons for this conflict we must go back to the origins of their frustrations, at the beginning of the last century, when these nomadic people were brutally confronted by a foreign power, which seized control of their lands by military means. We will focus on some of the key points, which are essential in understanding the origins of the armed groups.¹

As their lifestyle depended on moving freely across the Sahel, the nomadic populations never accepted the intervention of a central state, be it the colonial power or the independent governments since 1960. The colonial boundaries brought these people into large communities where they became a marginalized minority, restricted by borders and confronted by bureaucracy. This situation worsened with independence as the newly designated territories produced artificial borders, which, for example, divided the Tuaregs among five countries (Mali, Niger, Libya, Algeria and Burkina Faso).

For the new states of Mali and Niger, with their capital cities in the south of the country, the nomadic populations were simply remote people who respected neither frontiers nor national laws. The concept of a new highly centralized state, which both Mali and Niger inherited from France, only accentuated this distance and mistrust. The result was that the northern regions became isolated and economically less developed.

¹ For more detail, refer to two recent books, Boilley, P., *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh: Dépendances et révoltes*, Paris: Karthala, 1999 and Grégoire, E., *Touaregs du Niger: le destin d'un mythe*, Paris: Karthala, 1999

The first sign of this discontent was displayed in 1963 through an uprising in Mali with clear secessionist demands. This revolt was harshly quashed by the Malian authorities with some of the nomadic people deported to the edges of towns, their herds decimated and their home areas put under military control.

The nomadic populations reacted to these new authorities by taking all possible steps to preserve their freedom and their way of life, which is heavily regulated by clan chiefs. The newly independent states were suspicious of these conservative traditionalists who challenged their power and, in the case of Mali, their socialist ideology with its new social legislation and taxes.

Another element, which prevented them from adapting to these dramatic changes, was the refusal of clan chiefs, particularly among Tuareg, to send their children to colonial schools. The determination to assert their freedom meant that there were few educated Tuaregs when the young nations of Niger and Mali were setting up their own administrative structures. This major disadvantage at independence was further exacerbated by the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s. As Alhassane Ag Solimane, working in northern Niger for Medical Aid International (Aide Médicale Internationale - AMI) until February 2001, stated:

The nomads refused to send their children to school because it would have meant separation. At the time of independence, as there were no local officials, those from the south came to administer these regions. The nomads were able to continue their way of life as they still had many animals. With the drought, they lost everything and had to beg on the outskirts of the towns or go to neighbouring countries. Rich, proud and free men became refugees or displaced people without any means and despised by others.²

The fact that nomadic people now want to formally educate their children, despite the serious financial implications in a harsh economic climate, provides an opportunity to diminish exclusion in the future.

There was also serious Tuareg resentment against their lack of economic well-being, in Niger, where, unlike Mali, their home areas were rich in mineral deposits particularly uranium. Despite the soaring price of uranium in the 1970s, the indigenous populations saw no financial benefit at all. This issue re-surfaced in the 1994 manifesto of the Nigerien rebellion, which stated: “The profits [from uranium] have been divided up between France and her cronies in power in Niger [...]. Neither the Tuaregs nor their region have benefited in any way from this golden goose.”³

² Ag Solimane, A., Personal interview, Paris, 26 March 2001

³ Coordination de la résistance armée, *Programme-cadre de la résistance*, Niamey, 1994

3.2. The Outbreak of the Rebellion

This paper will focus on only two issues of the rebellion, which still have resonance today. Firstly, the misuse of international aid allocated for the repatriated people, which sparked off the rebellion, and secondly, the aims of the armed resistance movements and the remaining frustration caused by the gap between what was sought and what was achieved. The debate about the legitimacy of the demands of the various parties goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Although it is more usual for armed conflict to provoke a flow of refugees, in the case of the rebellions in Mali and Niger, it was the badly co-ordinated return of refugees from Algeria and Libya, which sparked off the rebellion in 1990. The movement was initiated by repatriated Nigeriens protesting against the misuse of funds given to assist them and led to the armed revolt in Mali and subsequently in Niger.

When Colonel Ali Saï bou came to power in Niger in 1987, he embarked on a policy of renewal and opened the country to the Tuareg refugees who had fled, promising them financial help. At the end of 1989 after a joint conference between Niger, Algeria and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the latter committed 1.5 thousand million CFA francs to finance their reintegration. The return began in early 1990 and some 18,000 people moved into the camps in the administrative area of Tchín-Tabaraden (300 km north-east of Niamey) in Niger. But the assistance did not reach the returned refugees. An expert told *Le Monde* in June 1990: "It is well known, in Agadez, that food which was destined for the repatriated people - grain and milk powder - was on sale in local shops with the complicity of the Prefecture and the local military chief."⁴

Some of the young repatriated people protested against this misuse of aid and were arrested in Tchín-Tabaraden. Other Tuaregs attacked the police station of this town to release their companions and the reaction of the Nigerien authorities was disproportionately brutal. Hundreds of Tuaregs were killed, women were raped and men were unveiled, representing the ultimate insult for people who never show their heads. Some Nigerien Tuaregs fled to neighbouring Mali and were arrested in the town of Menaka. Malian Tuaregs launched an armed attack to release them in June 1990 provoking retaliation by the Malian military, which effectively marked the beginning of the rebellion in Mali.

One characteristic of the fledgling-armed resistance movements in both Mali and Niger was the lack of a political structure to articulate coherent demands and to engage in dialogue with the central authorities. Indeed at the beginning, no one knew who the real leaders were. This might also be explained by the lack of formally educated people among the nomadic populations. In Mali, it was not until the end of September 1990, four months after the beginning of the attacks, that the name of Iyad Ag Ghali, who presented himself as the movement's leader, became known. His first public intervention confirms their lack of clear goal. This is what he said to *Le Monde*: "We have no ideological line. Our problem is not political. Rather we are a community which, since decolonization, has not been able to reach an understanding with those in power."⁵

⁴ De Barrin J., Des centaines de Touaregs tués au Niger, *Le Monde*, 15 June 1990

⁵ Nous ne sommes redevables de rien à la Libye, *Le Monde*, 30 September 1990

This initial lack of political structure was then followed by the development of divisions, initially in Mali, followed by Niger, into other armed groups each engaging in separate discussions with the central government. These schisms are partly explained by individual group allegiance to particular clan chiefs each of whom was reluctant to accept the leadership of another equal. There were also some non-Tuareg resistance movements, which appeared: in Mali, the Arab Islamic Front of Azawad (Front Islamique Arabe de l'Azaouad - FIIA), and in Niger, the Toubou movement the Democratic Front for Renewal (Front Démocratique du Renouveau - FDR).

The increasing number of rebellion fronts with their divergent demands made it all the more difficult for the governments of Mali and Niger to enter into dialogue with their opponents in the hope of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflicts. In July 1991, Lieutenant-Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré, the Malian Head of State, confirmed his desire for reconciliation with the different fronts but stated: "Our main difficulty is to know the interlocutor. Today, there are no less than fifteen."⁶

In spite of their divisions, the common demand of all armed movements was that the central government embarks on a path towards federalism. This is in sharp contrast to the secessionist aspirations of the 1963 rebellion in Mali. Iyad Ag Ghali, leader of the Malian Popular Movement of Azawad (Mouvement Populaire de l'Azaouad - MPA), said in July 1991 that his movement was demanding a particular status for the northern regions. He stated that "even federalism is a particular status" and added that "this is not a problem of terminology, but of substance."⁷ His Nigerien counterpart, Rhissa Boula, Commander in Chief of the Liberation Front for Aï r and Azawad (Front de Libération de l'Aï r et de l'Azaouad - FLAA), was more explicit in February 1992 when he stated that his fighters were "neither separatists nor were they demanding independence. We simply want a federal system where all nationalities possess their own administrative entity."⁸

3.3. The Response of the Malian and Nigerien Governments

Such federalist demands were clearly unacceptable to the governments in Bamako and Niamey, but the reaction by each government was quite different.

Recognizing the disproportionate reaction of the Nigerien authorities to the events in Tchintabaraden, President Ali Saï bou quickly tried to calm the situation by acknowledging that abuses had been committed and by transferring some of the local officials. By contrast, in Mali the government of Moussa Traoré granted the local officials of the sixth and seventh regions special powers and declared a state of emergency paving the way for extensive abuses by the security forces. The Malian army not only attacked the people, but also destroyed their economy by decimating their camel herds.

⁶ Agence France Presse, Mali: Le problème touareg reste 'l'une des plaies majeures de notre pays', selon le président Touré, 11 July 1991

⁷ Agence France Presse, Mali: Un dirigeant touareg demande un statut particulier pour les régions du Nord, 30 July 1991

⁸ Kaka, M., La rébellion se dévoile, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 27 February 1992

The different approaches can be partly explained by a fundamental difference between the Tuareg populations in Mali and in Niger. In Niger, the Tuaregs were present all over the country and had always had some representatives, even if only token, in government. The Tuaregs in Mali were far more isolated. They were mostly based in the sixth, seventh and eighth regions of the country, namely Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, all of which had been placed under military authority since the 1963 revolt, and so had little contact with other ethnic groups. The ostracism suffered by Tuaregs in Mali meant there were far more refugees and victims of violence from the Malian side than from Niger.

This different approach, linked to the better integration of Nigerien Tuaregs, also explains why the rebellion started in Mali and only later extended to Niger. As a French journalist stated in December 1990: “Unlike the Tuaregs in Mali, the Tuaregs in Niger - even though they quite often have family relationships with their Malian counterparts - do not seem ready to use arms to solve their problems.”⁹

The determining factor, which pushed the Tuareg rebellion in both countries into armed conflict, was the massive disappointment in the National Conferences held in Niamey and Bamako in 1991. These National Conferences, which aimed to provide a forum where the people could challenge their leaders after decades of single party rule, were seen by the Tuaregs as a unique occasion to have their needs heard and, in the case of Niger, to secure justice for the violations committed by the army at Tchín-Tabaraden. But neither the demands for justice nor federalism were addressed, making confrontation virtually certain. As Rhissa Boula of Niger’s FLAA clearly stated in February 1992: “The end of this Conference marked the end of any peaceful solution.”¹⁰

In Mali, the disappointment was even greater because six months before the July 1991 National Conference, a first peace accord was agreed in Tamanrasset (Algeria) between the Malian government and two fronts of the Malian rebellion. This accord granted a special status for the regions of the north. The disappointment of the fronts is highlighted by a press statement issued by the Malian MPA: “to our great surprise and consternation, and despite our insistence, we had no opportunity to raise our issues in the context of any of the themes proposed for the Conference.”¹¹

From this point, increasingly violent conflict was inevitable, as rebels took up arms, attacking military targets and committing acts of banditry against civilians, before eventually negotiating with the central governments to ensure their rights were recognized. It was further exacerbated by the lack of control by the Malian and Nigerien governments over their respective armed forces, who chose strong tactics against the uprising, and self-defence militias among sedentary groups, the black ethnic groups in Mali and Arabs in Niger, which took up arms to defend themselves against attacks from the rebels. This strong reaction from the army and self-defence militias led to indiscriminate attacks against Tuaregs, especially in Mali, which forced many to leave the country.

⁹ Ramir, S., Touaregs au Niger: entre révolte et espoir, *L’autre journal*, No. 7, December 1990

¹⁰ Kaka, M., La rébellion se dévoile

¹¹ Mouvement populaire de l’Azaouad, Dossier de presse: Touaregs du Mali, 7 May 1992 (unpublished document)

The conflict was particularly tough in northern Mali from 1994 when the self-defence group known as Ganda Koye (“owners of the lands”) was formed among the Songhaï , a black sedentary group. From the beginning, these people had had some sympathy with the rebellion led by nomadic Tuaregs and Arabs, because the Songhaï were also frustrated by the underdevelopment of the remote regions. But the demands and actions of the rebels, which related entirely to their own identity, forced the sedentary populations to defend themselves. As a Songhaï worker told a special reporter sent by *Le Monde* in January 1996: “At the beginning, when the rebels attacked tax officials, we were with them because our region had never been developed. But, afterwards, they became bandits.”¹² This defensive response was accompanied by racist terminology, where “bandit” and “Tuareg” became synonymous. One Bamako newspaper *La Voix du Nord* stated that “banditry is a normal situation for a Tamachek. They are a foreign body in our social fabric.”¹³ According to UNHCR figures, this increase in mutual ethnic hatred led 1,000 victims and some 150,000 Malian refugees to flee to Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger between 1990 and 1994.¹⁴ As the conflict in Niger was less violent, the number of Tuareg refugees was proportionately fewer. According to the national Nigerien repatriation coordination body, some 40,000 people fled to Algeria and Burkina Faso.¹⁵

4. Peace Agreements and their Implementation

The Malian and Nigerien governments called upon Algeria and France to act as mediators in the hope of finding a compromise solution to the rebellions’ federalist demands. Thanks to their mediation, peace accords were finally signed first in Mali in the form of a National Pact (*Pacte national*) in 1992. In Niger several peace accords were reached from 1995 onwards. The Malian and Nigerien agreements had several issues in common: disarmament and reintegration of former rebel combatants, the return of refugees and special status to encourage the economic development of the northern regions. However, these peace agreements did not immediately bring peace to the region. On the contrary, in Mali the violence increased intensively after the National Pact was signed, with the result that further tens of thousands fled, which in turn delayed the implementation of measures included in the agreements.

There were three further reasons why the implementation of the peace agreement was not possible, at least in the short-term:

- These agreements were hastily signed by fragile governments which were about to be replaced. The National Pact was signed in Bamako on 11 April 1992 on the eve of the presidential elections called to end the transitional government, which had ruled the country since the downfall of President Moussa Traoré in March 1991. Similarly, the first peace agreement signed between the co-ordinating group of Nigerien rebel groups and the government in Niamey was signed in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) in October

¹² Sotinel, T., Ganda Koye, ou la revanche des paysans, *Le Monde*, 31 January 1996

¹³ Claudot-Hawad, H., ‘Négrafricanisme’ et racisme, *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1995

¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Appeal*, Geneva, December 1998, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001], section on West Africa

¹⁵ Geslin, J-D., La paix retrouvée, *Jeune Afrique*, 17-23 November 1998

1994, when Nigerien President Mahamane Ousmane had just lost his parliamentary majority and was embarking on a difficult period of co-habitation with the opposition. So it fell to governments that had not negotiated the agreements and did not agree on all points, to apply them.

- The agreements were signed without consultation with the population, particularly where it concerned the degree of autonomy to be granted to the northern regions, especially in the Malian National Pact. This lack of clarity worried those keen to preserve national unity. These included the armed forces and those among the sedentary ethnic groups, who feared they might become marginalized, even though forming the majority in some areas, if the Tuaregs were to be granted power.
- The costs of the rehabilitation of ex-combatants and the development of the northern regions were beyond the capabilities of the governments and the donors were not prepared, in the short-term at least, to fund them.

The delays in implementing the accords only increased the frustration of the nomadic populations and provoked further schisms within the armed rebel movements. It was not until 1995, when the situation became calmer, especially in Mali, that some of the main provisions could begin to be implemented. We analyse below two key issues raised in the peace accords. Later, in Section Four, which deals with current instability factors, we will look at the thorny issue of decentralization.

4.1. Disarmament and the Reintegration of Former Rebel Combatants

The first goal of the peace accords was to restore calm to the affected area, which would require urgent containment, disarmament and reintegration of former rebel combatants. But, in both countries disarmament and reintegration came across three major obstacles:

- After an initial refusal by the different rebel organizations to detail the arms held and list the names of their combatants, there was a period of intense bargaining between clan leaders with the result that relatives, friends and even people from the south of the countries to whom these local chiefs were indebted appeared on the lists rather than real combatants who had no jobs. Some of these former combatants have since resorted to violence to make their voice heard or to make a living from banditry;
- There was intense mistrust and considerable reticence within the military and political authorities who feared that the massive integration of ex-combatants into the national armies of Mali and Niger would destabilize the national armies;
- The Malian and Nigerien governments did not have sufficient financial resources to integrate thousands of men into the army or into an already overstaffed bureaucracy. At the same time the International Monetary Fund was putting pressure on these countries to cut government expenditure and specifically reduce the number of civil servants.

Despite all these delays, which provoked numerous protests by the rebel groups, a large number of former rebel combatants were eventually integrated in the two countries. In Mali, according to the Commissariat of the North, 2,490 ex-rebels were integrated either into the army or the civil service.¹⁶ In Niger, according to a report specially prepared for this paper

¹⁶ Boilley, P., *Mali: Stabilité du Nord-Mali: Des responsabilités partagées*, WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, May 1999 (UNHCR/CDR REFWORLD Databases)

by Mohamed Ag Anacko, a presidential adviser, 2,852 ex-combatants were integrated into the armed forces or civil service.¹⁷ These are a long way from the figures prepared by the rebel organizations - the Malian organizations spoke of 7,000 and the Nigeriens of 5,900 ex-combatants in need of reintegration - provoking much protest by the organizations. In June 2000, on Nigerien national radio, Sia Katou, commander in chief of the Union of Armed Resistance Fronts (Union des Fronts de la Résistance Armée - UFRA), complained that 3,500 ex-combatants were still waiting to be integrated.¹⁸

Leaving aside the disagreements over figures, this integration has had some positive elements. In Mali, where the Tuaregs were very socially isolated, the dispatch of Tuareg soldiers and civil servants into other regions of the country has facilitated contacts with other population groups. In Niger, mixed units known as Saharan Security Units (Unités Sahariennes de Sécurité - USS) and composed of Tuaregs, Arabs, Toubous and groups from the south, have been set up to patrol the northern regions and provide security along the transport routes. Recent events on the Mali/Niger border proved their effectiveness as indicated by Abdoukarim Mahamadou, Director of *Radio Sarahounia*, a private radio station in Niamey. He said: "these units are very effective and recently, in collaboration with the Malian security forces, they managed to track down some bandits who had been active along this whole frontier".¹⁹

However, some of those ex-combatants who were integrated could not cope with military discipline and deserted taking their weapons with them. Such incidents have increased mistrust within the army and other groups who were already reluctant to accept the idea of integration. An article, provocatively entitled: "Should we have confidence in these integrated rebels?" which appeared in *Le Républicain* (Bamako), stated: "In numerous cases, the departure of those who had been integrated is accompanied by a blood bath. Those who leave do not hesitate to target their comrades in arms."²⁰ In Mali, another problem was the anger of the powerful National Union of Workers (Union Nationale des Travailleurs) which protested in 1994 against the integration of ex-combatants into the civil service at a time when the structural adjustment plans were restricting the government's budget for public spending.

Even if the integration of former rebel combatants has not been fully completed, the Malian and Nigerien authorities have at least managed to bring all former fighters to military bases where they have been disarmed. There have been ceremonies called, Flame of Peace (La Flamme de la Paix), in Timbuktu in Mali in March 1996 and Agadez in Niger in September 2000, where thousands of decommissioned arms belonging to the rebellion fronts and the self defence militias have been burned. The impact of this symbolic act of incineration is very strong. However many sources indicate that only old arms were given back and burnt and that all the warring parties retained some smaller and more efficient weapons to protect

¹⁷ Ag Anacko, M., manuscript statement, March 2001

¹⁸ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Niger: Disarmament of armed groups reaches final stage, quoting *La Voix du Sahel*, 6 June 2000

¹⁹ Mahamadou, A., Niamey. Telephone interview, 7 April 2001

²⁰ Cheikna H. S., Armée: Faut-il faire confiance aux rebelles intégrés?, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 27 September 1995

themselves against attacks by armed bandits and to respond to possible new conflicts with the authorities or neighbouring populations. This fact is confirmed by Mahmoud-Alpha Maï ga, former representative of Ganda Koye in France, who was present at the March 1996 ceremony in Timbuktu: “The rebels only handed over outdated weapons and those seized from the Malian army. The same for Ganda Koye, we did not hand in our best weapons. No new weapons were seen in Timbuktu on that day.”²¹

4.2. The Return of the Refugees

The voluntary repatriation of refugees, which was provided for in the peace accords in both Mali and Niger, did not happen immediately because of the resumption of fighting. In Mali, it was not until 1995, three years after the signing of the National Pact, that the situation allowed repatriation to begin under the auspices of the UNHCR. From October 1995, the situation was much calmer and repatriation was both large-scale and voluntary. According to the *Le Républicain* (Bamako), from the beginning of 1996 some 70,000 Tuareg and Moorish refugees returned either with UNHCR help or spontaneously. They went back to their home areas, but were without resources. Those who had lost their camels tried to adapt to market gardening. The refugees who left the camps with UNHCR assistance received food for three months.²²

In November 1996, the first tri-partite agreement between the UNHCR, Mali and Niger was signed with a view to repatriating some 25,000 Malian Tuaregs from Niger, followed by Tuareg refugees from Mauritania. The Tuaregs who had fled to Burkina Faso proved the most reluctant to return because some of their chiefs did not agree with elements of the peace accords.²³ Eventually, being assured of stability, the vast majority of the Malian Tuareg refugees who had been in Burkina Faso returned with UNHCR help in 1997.²⁴

The return of the refugees in Mali created some tension between the repatriated refugees and the sedentary populations. The former refugees wanted to retain the same advantages they had had in the camps with regard to water, education and health care. As they were aware of the potential for disagreement between the returnees who were assisted by aid agencies and the resident population also struggling daily with the harsh local environment, the UNHCR, together with its partners, decided from the beginning of its repatriation programme to help all sections of the population equally, seeking “to improve the living conditions of returnees and the local population in northern Mali”.²⁵

²¹ Maï ga, M.A., Personal interview, Paris, April 2001

²² Sangaré, B., Touaregs: ‘La faim est pire que la guerre’, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 23 October 1996

²³ Agence France Presse, Burkina Faso: Les Touaregs réfugiés au Burkina Faso hésitent à rentrer au Mali, 25 December 1996

²⁴ Le dernier grand retour des réfugiés touaregs du Burkina Faso vers le Mali, *Afrique Express*, 30 October 1997

²⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Report*, Geneva, June 2000, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001], section on Mali

As their reintegration programme came to an end in 1999, the UNHCR estimated that some 132,000 refugees had returned to Mali and Albert-Alain Peter, a senior member of UNHCR staff based in Geneva, termed it a “success story out of Africa”.²⁶ The UNHCR’s representative in Mali, Arnault-Antoine Akodjenou clarified that in 1999 the UNHCR had finished its task of repatriation to Mali and that this four-year programme had cost US\$240 million, benefiting 305,000 refugees and displaced persons in Mali.²⁷

In Niger there was also a delay in the repatriation process as envisaged in the 1995 peace accords because of the lack of internal political security across the country and the boycott by certain donor governments following the military coup in January 1996 led by Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maï nassara. The repatriation did not actually start until 1997 but internal difficulties in Niger made the situation worse. The February 1998 mutiny by soldiers in Agadez, who were demanding payment of several months salary arrears, delayed the departure of the first convoy sent to Algeria to assist the voluntary repatriation of 10,000 Tuaregs.²⁸ Eventually, the repatriation was started under the supervision of the UNHCR, Algerian Red Crescent and the Nigerien Red Cross. It occurred in the context of an agreement signed between Algeria, Niger and the UNHCR, which invested some US\$1.5 million to dig and construct wells in the areas of Tahoua, Agadez and Arlit.

The repatriations continued and finished with the Nigerien refugees from Burkina Faso. However, in Niger, there is still the problem of some Toubou people in the east of the country who are reluctant to return because of the insecurity along the border with Chad. Some Toubous took up arms in 1994 and formed the Democratic Revolutionary Front (Front Démocratique Révolutionnaire - FDR), which was demanding autonomy for the regions of Manga and Kawar, which border onto Nigeria and Chad respectively. In August 1998 the Nigerien government signed a peace agreement with the FDR in N’Djamena, the Chadian capital, and the Toubou rebels, like the Tuareg rebels before them, were brought to military bases and disarmed. However, this peace agreement did not prevent the massacre of some 150 Toubou refugees who had been expelled from Nigeria and whose bodies were discovered in January 1999 in a mass grave at Bouloungoure, near to Lake Chad.

Despite this peripheral issue, the Nigerien Tuareg refugee problem seems to have been resolved. As Maman Abou, the director of the newspaper *Le Républicain* (Niamey), stated in March 2001: “The problem of Tuareg refugees who fled because of the insecurity in the north of the country in the early 1990s has been solved. All those who wanted to return have been able to. If some remain refugees, they are economic refugees who do not want to return because they are now settled in Algeria, for example.”²⁹ This was also confirmed by the UNHCR in its 2001 Global Appeal where it was stated that: “2001 represents the last year of UNHCR’s support for the reintegration of the 3,500 Tuaregs who returned from Mali to some 15 sites in a semi-desert environment in the north.”³⁰

²⁶ Tuareg Repatriation Dubbed Success Story, *Conflict Watch*, May 1997

²⁷ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, Mali: UNHCR Wraps Up Its Operation in the North, 25 June 1999

²⁸ Niger: les réfugiés attendront..., *Jeune Afrique*, 3-9 March 1998

²⁹ Abou, M. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

³⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *2001 Global Appeal*, Geneva, December 2000, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001], section on West and Central Africa

5. Factors Contributing Towards Instability

The different fronts of the rebellion in Mali and Niger agreed to sign peace accords and lay down their arms in exchange for an undertaking by the governments of Bamako and Niamey that the affected populations would be granted increased autonomy and financial help to redress the economic problems arising from years of central government neglect. In Mali, where decentralization was introduced in 1999, there is evidence that some measures have already been taken. However, because of economic difficulties and internal reticence, neither the Malian nor Nigerien government has substantially invested in these regions, and their populations are still waiting to see the economic benefits of the peace settlement.

This dissatisfaction carries many threats if it persists. Already in Mali at the end of 2000, there were worrying incidents between one ex-rebel group and the Malian army. In Niger, if we set aside some isolated acts of banditry, the complaints are only verbal at the moment, but there is tangible exasperation amongst some ex-combatants who could be tempted to take up arms again if their voice is not heard.

5.1. The Slow Pace of Decentralization

Behind the conceptual arguments between federalism, decentralization or “special status” (the term finally adopted by the 1992 National Pact in Mali), the fronts of the rebellion in both Mali and Niger had initially sought recognition that their regions had particular features and required specific government funds to allow these areas to reach the level of development achieved in other regions. We shall look at these initial demands of the rebel movements and the extent to which they have been met to assess the risks of dissatisfaction spilling over into further acts of protest.

The first peace accord signed between the Malian government and two rebel fronts in Tamanrasset, in January 1991, provided for administrative autonomy and stated that 47.3 per cent of Mali’s fourth investment budget would be paid to the three northern regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. This represented a considerable concession on the part of the Malian government indicating how concerned General Moussa Traoré had been to quell unrest in the north, so that he could confront the popular protest movement which was to overthrow him two months later.

The initial demands of the various fronts of the rebellion in Niger were also very high. In its manifesto published in 1994, the Coordination of the Armed Resistance (Coordination de la Résistance Armée - CRA), demanded that a quarter of the investment budget and 40 per cent of the net tax revenue from the mining companies operating in the region should be given directly to the northern regions.³¹ This document defines the geographical area over which the rebellion claims autonomy as more than 2,000,000 km square or 16 per cent of the national territory.

The demands of the Nigerien Tuareg rebellion seemed to many to be unrealistic and over ambitious. The Nigerien head of State, Mahamane Ousmane, vigorously rejected the

³¹ Coordination de la résistance armée

autonomist demands by stating that “partition of Niger” is quite “unacceptable”.³² Agga Alhatt, spokesperson for the black Tuareg community in Niger (which for centuries has been dominated and subjected to slavery by the “light-skinned” Tuaregs) refused to allow the rebellion fronts to speak for them. While he reiterated his community’s “commitment to national unity” Agga Alhatt stated that “those who have gone to the bush in luxury must realise that we from the black community no longer want any other intermediaries or advocates for our cause.”³³

As much as the Malian and Nigerien governments were willing to try and reach agreement with the fronts of the rebellion in order to stop this war which was ruining their already desperate economies, they could not concede to such political and economic demands, because they had to take into account the opinion of the army and the majority of the population. In particular, they had to keep in mind the sedentary groups, who represented the majority in some parts of the northern and eastern parts of these countries and who were entitled to fear their marginalization.

In Mali the transitional government, which took over from Moussa Traoré in March 1992, sought a compromise, which might have satisfied all sectors of the population by proposing decentralization across the whole country. This idea was rejected by the MPA as they felt the proposal “contradicted and rejected the special status granted by the Tamanrasset accord”.³⁴ Despite the fact that the “special status” was recognized in the National Pact, the government of Mali’s first democratically elected President, Alpha Oumar Konaré chose a broader programme of decentralization in order to obtain a consensus from all parts of the population.

However, this compromise aroused dissatisfaction with some Tuareg intellectuals. For example, in January 1994, Cheikh Ag Baye stated: “The Malian government has rushed ahead with adopting and implementing decentralization to avoid implementing special status for the North. In fact, a well-designed generalized decentralization and a special status adapted to the particularities of the North should not be incompatible.”³⁵

Despite a few isolated protests, the Malian authorities pursued the option of generalized decentralization instead of special treatment for the northern regions. Although decentralization was a reasonable compromise, the fact that its implementation was seriously delayed further fed the frustration of the northern people. In Mali, the first municipal elections in the new communes did not take place until June 1999, seven years after the National Pact was signed. These resulted in the election of local political candidates, in particular Songhai and Tuaregs. After decades of military control and public affairs being run by those from the south, this undeniably represents major progress towards a devolution of power and responsibility to the newly elected representatives.

³² Agence France Presse, Niger: Le Président Ousmane opposé à la ‘partition’ du pays, 6 March 1994

³³ Document-cadre de la communauté touareg de souche noire, March 1994 (unpublished document)

³⁴ Mouvement populaire de l’Azaouad

³⁵ Quoted in Cheikh, A. B., Le pacte national: deux ans après, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 26 January 1994

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Niger, where legislation for decentralization is still being discussed. This delay is largely due to the political instability resulting from two military *coups d'état* in 1996 and 1999.

The 1995 peace accord proposed a law to introduce regionalization and decentralization of the territorial boundaries and their administrative procedures but several factors have delayed these reforms. At the beginning, there was persistent insecurity caused by scissions between the different rebel groups and the newly created non-Tuareg rebel fronts like the FDR, which were not part of the peace accords but which were demanding autonomy for Kawar and Manga, regions between the Libyan border and Lake Chad where there are large oil deposits. Later, insecurity was created by political difficulties arising from the rivalry throughout 1995 between President Mahamane Ousmane and his Prime Minister, Hama Amadou. This political paralysis explains why the rebellion welcomed the *coup d'état* of General Ibrahim Baré Maï nassara in January 1996. The various rebel groups stated their belief that the military were "best placed" to resolve the problems created by the rebellion.³⁶

Once in power, the military government promised economic development for the northern regions and nominated some Tuareg leaders to ministerial and advisory roles. The first laws governing decentralization were passed in 1996 but with no real popular consultation, as emphasized by Mohamed Anacko, currently presidential advisor, in a hand-written statement specially prepared for this report: "Despite all these laws, we must regrettably acknowledge that the nomadic groups were not taken into account: the discussions were held without the involvement of members of the former resistance and without consultation with the affected populations themselves."³⁷

The first attempt to hold municipal elections took place in January 1999, but the widespread fraud, which surrounded them eventually, led to the assassination of President Ibrahim Baré Maï nassara in April that same year. The new military government cancelled the elections in response to demands from all opposition parties. A final draft bill creating 229 communes was finally adopted by the government on 13 April 2001. It must now face scrutiny during the current sitting of the National Assembly. In theory the municipal elections could take place in the coming months, but the government has already stated that the holding of elections will depend on whether donors respond to the government's specific request for funds.

The decentralization plan raises fears amongst the traditional leaders, including the Tuaregs, who had publicly complained about the planned division of the whole territory into communes. As the Nigerien correspondent of Reuters, Abdoulaye Moussa Massalatchi, said: "The traditional chiefs are worried about seeing part of their prerogative being devolved to elected municipal councillors. A seminar in March 2001 tried to convince them of the validity of this project, but the chiefs do not want the new communal divisions to interfere with their traditional communities."³⁸ In the face of local resistance and the financial problems surrounding the holding of elections, it is by no means clear when Niger will start

³⁶ Agence France Presse, Niger: L'ex-rébellion touarègue 'heureuse' du coup d'Etat, 30 January 1996

³⁷ Ag Anacko, M., manuscript statement, March 2001

³⁸ Massalatchi, A. M., Niamey. Telephone interview, 19 April 2001

on the path towards devolution and therefore towards meeting one of the main aims of the former fronts of the rebellion.

In addition to the practical and political problems, some observers claim that decentralization itself, without sufficient financial support and the necessary change in political practices, will bring its own difficulties. For instance, as Maman Abou highlights: “Decentralization could become a very heavy burden for the populations concerned as some local chiefs will become regional presidents only to milk the population with new taxes.”³⁹ Another Nigerien, Alhassane Ag Solimane, who was directly involved in development work until February 2001 stated: “If the practices of power are not changed, the corruption which reigns at central government level will contaminate the newly elected local leaders.”⁴⁰ These opinions, challenging the implementation though not the principle of decentralization, must be given serious consideration because they indicate important sources of likely tension in the future.

Despite the fact that the success of decentralization depends on the resources given to local authorities and on a new ethics within public administration, the demands for power to be transferred from the centre to the regions, as happened in Mali, remains a vital requirement for the local populations in peripheral parts of both countries. The following candid statement from Mahmoud-Alpha Maï ga, the former representative in France for Ganda Koye, contains a surprising complement to his former enemies: “It is thanks to the Tuareg rebellion that the central government has accepted decentralization and this represents an important step because now it will be a local person, who knows the people and local customs, who will run the local affairs and no longer a civil servant sent from the South.”⁴¹

5.2. The Risks of a Return to Violence

The delays in granting economic and political autonomy to the local populations carry some heavy risks. Paradoxically, it is in Mali, where this process is more advanced, that more serious troubles between ex-rebel Tuaregs and the army took place in late 2000.

For the moment, in Niger, apart from a few isolated acts of banditry, the frustration is merely voiced. However, the risk of a return to armed protest remains as Moussa Kaka, journalist with *Le Républicain* (Niamey), clearly explained in June 2000 at the time when the last Tuareg and Toubou fronts were being disarmed in Niger:

It falls to the State of Niger to honour its commitments. The rebels have made the noble gesture of laying down their arms. It is now clearly time for the State to move towards a process of decentralization and to assist ex-combatants to re-establish themselves in socio-economic terms with the help of development partners. Let us not forget. The rebels have disarmed. At the merest hint of hesitation on the part of the State, the ex-rebels know

³⁹ Abou, M., Personal interview, Paris, late April 2001

⁴⁰ Ag Solimane, A. Personal interview, Paris, late April 2001

⁴¹ Maï ga, M.A. Personal interview, Paris, late April 2001

better than anyone how to re-arm. Eight years ago they started with two kalachnikovs. Today, they have handed over several tonnes of equipment⁴²

Some former Nigerien Tuareg fighters do not hide their readiness to take up arms if promises are not kept. Glenn McKenzie, journalist with Associated Press, met Mohamed Abdullah, a former Tuareg fighter, in Adagez in September 1999, who said: “We believed that if we endured suffering in the war, everything would be all right when peace came. But it is taking too long, and the government needs to know that we fought once and can fight again.”⁴³

According to the sources presented in this paper, it does not seem that there is an immediate risk that the Nigerien rebellion will resume. But this cannot be ruled out in the future, especially if the economic situation does not improve. As Alhassane Ag Solimane of AMI says: “The populations are not ready to take up arms again, but there could be unrest or acts of banditry because people are unhappy about the slowness of economic improvements. But if this dissatisfaction grows, it could lead to a new rebellion, because the acts of banditry will lead to reprisals within the populations and the cycle of violence will again start.”⁴⁴

Maman Abou emphasizes the weariness experienced by the population after years of insecurity: “The people are fed up with war. During the rebellion, the population was trapped between the army and rebels. A return to war seems difficult to me. In any event, the population will do all it can to stop it, but that does not exclude acts of violence or isolated incidents of protest.”⁴⁵

For the moment, the ex-rebel leaders are limiting themselves to verbal attacks. At the last rebel disarmament ceremony of June 2000, Sia Katou, military commander of the UFRA, launched the following appeal to the authorities on national radio: “We expect the government to do everything to ensure that decentralization, which, for the resistance movements, constitutes the backbone of all the terms of the peace accord, is realized because, at the moment, decentralization is only on paper but has to become reality.”⁴⁶ Similarly, in November 2000, in a letter addressed to the Nigerien Head of State, the Collective of ex-Tuareg combatants (Collectif des ex-Combattants de l'ex-Résistance Armée Touarègue), complained that “the number of Tuareg officials and civil servants appointed is insufficient, despite what the peace accords claim. Instead, the situation has been deteriorating for the past two years. There are certainly some officials in post, but they are not in a position to give of their best.”⁴⁷

⁴² Kaka, M., Désarmement des fronts armés, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 8-14 June 2000

⁴³ Associated Press, McKenzie, G., Nigerien Warriors Growing Restless, 11 September 1999

⁴⁴ Ag Solimane, A. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁴⁵ Abou, M., Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁴⁶ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 6 June 2000

⁴⁷ Collectif des ex-combattants de l'ex-résistance armée touarègue, Lettre au Président de la République du Niger, 20 November 2000 (unpublished document)

Beyond the verbal attacks, the isolated acts of banditry in the north of Niger could be explained by the presence of ex-combatants who have not been integrated and who remain frustrated, especially as some rebel leaders received financial and honorary benefits following the signing of peace accords. In both Mali and Niger, the governments have effectively managed to distance some Tuareg leaders from their support bases by offering them ministerial posts or enviable positions in business or tourism and even large sums of money, as this Nigerien journalist explains: “Since 4 May 2000, the 14 rebel front leaders have received their leaving bonus, 5 million CFA francs each person.”⁴⁸ In Mali, just after the national pact had been signed and well before the situation became calm, the government arranged “for the leaders of the MFUA who had signed the pact to move into luxury hotels in Bamako, cutting them off from the Tuareg and Moorish populations who were struggling to survive in the refugee camps.”⁴⁹

This frustration has led some ex-combatants to resort to acts of banditry to obtain some small benefit from the former leaders. At least, this is a view reported by Marie Béjel, President of the Association Touaregs, which has been organizing development projects in northern Niger for many years. Talking about a visit to Agadez in March 2001, she said: “Just recently a female Swiss tourist was held hostage for a few hours. From what I heard, this was organized by ex-combatants who wanted to get a few cars from the former leader. They received the cars and the hostage was released.”⁵⁰

Although in Niger the frustration is expressed for the moment only verbally and in isolated acts of banditry, Mali has recently seen a cycle of violence between an ex-rebel group and the army for the first time since the situation grew calmer in 1995. The tension peaked in December 2000 when a Malian soldier was killed and four others kidnapped by a group of men led by Ibrahim Bahanga, whom the Malian authorities referred to as an ex-Tuareg rebel who had been integrated into the Malian army but had later deserted. Ibrahim Bahanga first came to public attention during the municipal elections in June 1999, when he seized a ballot box at a polling station near to Menaka (to the east of Kidal), and took a few people prisoner to demand that the new administrative boundaries be re-drawn.

There are several interpretations of the events of late 2000. The Malian military say that Ibrahim Bahanga’s group had been responsible for a series of kidnappings and car thefts, which forced the army to launch a large scale military operation in Kidal region in late November 2000. The incident, which led to the death of a Malian soldier reportedly, took place following an attack by this armed group against soldiers who were escorting a mobile vaccination centre in Tin-Essako, in the east Kidal region.⁵¹

Sources close to the Tuareg community give a quite different version. Odile Hardy, who has been organizing development projects in the region of Kidal, states that the soldiers had

⁴⁸ Kaka, M., Tous les fronts bientôt désarmés, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 1-7 July 2000

⁴⁹ Baqué, P., Nouvel enlèvement des espoirs de paix dans le conflit touareg au Mali, *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1995

⁵⁰ Béjel, M. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁵¹ Agence France Presse, Mali: Recherches pour retrouver quatre militaires enlevés dans le nord, 5 December 2000

been attacked by Ibrahim Bahanga's group because the military had been hunting animals using sub-machine guns. "The nomads in that zone had witnessed bullets whistling above their heads. Ibrahim Bahanga who was nearby, heard the shots and rushed to the spot out of concern for the families who pass through the area."⁵² In Odile Hardy's view, it was to protect these families that the group reportedly attacked the military patrol.

For Mahmoud-Alpha Maï ga of Ganda Koye who had returned from a visit to the region of Gao in March 2001, these troubles were predictable and threatened the future.

The Bahanga affair is not surprising. For years now, Tuaregs integrated into the army have deserted taking their weapons with them. These minor acts of violence are committed with the consent of the ex-leaders of the rebellion who have become involved in politics. As for us Songhai, we are ready to defend ourselves again, as we did with Ganda Koye in 1994. Just like the Tuareg rebel groups, we have retained our arms and we will not allow these violent groups to attack and pillage us.⁵³

Whatever the truth may be, this is very reminiscent of the main stages of the rebellion in northern Mali in the 1990s: insecurity in the North by a small armed protest group, followed by the deployment of troops to find an untraceable enemy, a risk that self defence groups emerge amongst the black sedentary populations to protect themselves against the rebellion and ending with the intervention of a foreign mediator. In this case it is again Algeria, who negotiated with Ibrahim Bahanga to release the four soldiers. The role of Algeria was clear as Algeria's ambassador was in the plane, which brought the hostages from Kidal to Bamako.⁵⁴

The situation may be calmer for the moment, but if the findings of Odile Hardy are correct, it may not remain so for long. She states that during the raids carried out by the military to find Ibrahim Bahanga's hideout: "numerous incidents took place within the military battalions and barracks between the soldiers from the South and the Tuaregs integrated in the armed forces: unnecessary insults and accusations of supporting and sheltering rebels, giving them information, arms and ammunition."⁵⁵ If this information is confirmed by other sources, this could challenge all the progress made during these last six years.

Quite separate from this most serious incident, other independent observers who have recently visited Mali have noted worrying signs of frustration. A French journalist, Yves Hardy, wrote in April 2000: "Those left out of the reintegration programmes are absolutely key. The Tuareg population is still waiting for something to come out of the peace." And he concludes his article with: "It is clear that the forgotten people of northern Mali are waiting for significant steps to be taken, especially towards increased autonomy. The official rhetoric

⁵² Hardy, O., *Détails des événements récents survenus dans le Nord du Mali*, February 2001 (unpublished document)

⁵³ Maï ga, M. A. Personal interview, Paris, April 2001

⁵⁴ Agence France Presse, Mali: Libération de dix militaires kidnappés dans le nord, 25 February 2001

⁵⁵ Hardy, O.

about integration is no longer sufficient to calm the spirits. But has this impatience been fully noted in Bamako and elsewhere?"⁵⁶

If, as in Niger, the majority of the populations in Mali who supported the rebellion do not seem ready to take up arms, their demands must be urgently met. There is a clear role here for the governments in Niamey and Bamako and for the donors and development NGOs that have been working in these areas for many years. What follows is therefore an examination of the role played by this international assistance, which is so vital to the stability of these zones.

6. International Aid and NGO Action

The peace accords, which brought an end to the conflicts in Mali and Niger, included very ambitious projects for economic reintegration and development in the northern and eastern regions of each country, which far outreached the resources of these fragile economies. Assistance from foreign donors, UN and non-governmental agencies was indispensable. However, this assistance did not arrive promptly for a variety of reasons, including the persistent insecurity as well as lack of interest shown by certain countries.

When at last calm did return, international assistance arrived and many large-scale projects, in particular those helping returning refugees, began. Many NGOs are continuing this essential work to maintain stability in these regions where so much was promised in return for an end to armed rebellion. However, in many key areas the needs were so great that the expectations are far from being met. To assess these projects and the current needs, we have spoken to several development workers with experience in Niger and Mali. Some live in the field. Others have made numerous visits building on their long-term experience of the projects. All those interviewed were there during the first quarter of 2001 and so bring a recent view of the current situation.

6.1. The Large-scale, If Belated, Assistance

The assistance was delayed for different reasons in the two countries, even though the continuing insecurity was an issue in both.

In Mali, the delay seemed to be caused by the non-interest, or at least reluctance, of certain key countries to immediately seize the opportunity offered by the April 1992 National Pact to set up development projects. This donor reticence was denounced in July 1992 by Tiébilé Dramé, Malian Minister for Foreign Affairs in the transitional government, which had negotiated the National Pact, in an article published in *Le Républicain* (Bamako):

The National Pact provides the framework and conditions for a lasting peace in the northern regions. But it has a price. The whole world is aware of the plight of the Tuaregs. But what do we notice when it comes to implementing peace? To this day Mali alone - with Algeria - is suffering the financial implications of implementing the Pact. Even worse, at recent negotiations in Washington between the Malian authorities and the Bretton Woods institutions, their intransigence concerning public spending on

⁵⁶ Hardy, Y., Mali, Les Touaregs ont le blues, *Croissance*, April-May 2001

salaries jeopardizes the incorporation of ex-combatants into the national army. Even though this is one of the corner stones of the security measures needed for a definitive return to peace.⁵⁷

Mali found itself in a vicious circle - the lack of economic assistance fed the discontent of the populations and ex-combatants, some of whom took up arms again. This led to insecurity and a violent reaction by some sectors of the army and the sedentary populations who were already hostile to the National Pact. The result was large-scale violence, which delayed any organized assistance planned by the international community. It was not until July 1995 - seven years after the National Pact was signed - that a conference took place in Timbuktu between the Malian government and the development partners in northern Mali. This conference was possible because an agreement reached between Tuareg rebel groups and Ganda Koye had brought calm to the area.

It opened the way for some of the most important measures provided for in the National Pact to be implemented. The important role of the UNHCR in this repatriation programme has been described above (Section Four). In the context of the Support Programme for the Socio-economic Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Northern Mali (Programme d'Appui à la Réinsertion Socio-économique des ex-Combattants du nord-Mali - PAREM), financed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), many ex-combatants received help, and programmes were also set up to support refugees, who returned either spontaneously or with UNHCR help. The assistance provided by the UN agencies (UNHCR, UNDP and the World Food Programme - WFP) and others such as the significant North-Mali Program (Programme Mali-Nord - PMN), financed by the German Organization for Technical Cooperation (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit - GTZ), have been studied in detail in other reports.⁵⁸

In this report, we will simply emphasize two elements, which informed the choices of the UNHCR and other aid agencies:

- The need not only to provide assistance to returning refugees and internally displaced people, but also to extend the assistance to all local people who were equally suffering as a result of the lack of infrastructure in terms of water, health and education.
- The need to go beyond short-term relief work and to invest in long-term, sustainable development work.

The first element was considered essential to avoid friction between those returning from exile who were receiving international assistance and those who had remained, in particular the sedentary Songhai in Mali. This latter group would have been justified in resenting the imbalance in assistance as they equally suffered from the lack of state investment in their remote region. This explains why the UNHCR decided as follows: "UNHCR's assistance programmes, for example, make no real distinction between former refugees, returning

⁵⁷ Dramé, T., Question touareg: la communauté internationale veut-elle la paix?, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 16 September 1992

⁵⁸ See Sperl, S., *International Refugee Aid and Social Change in Northern Mali*, New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 22, Geneva: UNHCR, July 2000

displaced people and the resident population, as the needs of these different groups are all essentially the same.”⁵⁹

Moreover, it quickly became clear to the UN and non-governmental bodies that short-term help was not sufficient and there was also a need for longer-term development projects. As the Malian refugees had experienced far better sanitary conditions and food security in their countries of exile, such development was essential to encourage them to return home. In fact the UNHCR remained six months beyond the end of 1998, their planned withdrawal date, even though repatriation had been completed. The UNHCR justified their decision by the need to redress the imbalance between the area around Timbuktu which was more prosperous (because of numerous development programmes) and the more isolated and precarious areas of Gao and in particular Kidal in the extreme north-east.

In its 1999 Global Appeal, this UN agency said: “UNHCR contributes to durable reintegration with modest-scale projects of direct and immediate benefit to vulnerable groups of returnees and to host communities in the northeast regions of Gao and Kidal. Projects focus on self-sufficiency and on water, health and education facilities.”⁶⁰

After the withdrawal of UNHCR from northern Mali in June 1999, several other organizations, for example, Action Contre la Faim, Médecins du Monde, l’Agence pour la coopération et la recherche en matière de développement, GTZ, Africare, World Vision and AMI, have continued to work in the field of development.

In Niger, delays in international assistance were almost entirely due to the internal political instability which led to two military *coups d’état* in January 1996 and April 1999. Following the 1995 peace accords, donors promised 18.5 thousand million CFA (28 million Euros), but this was frozen by many states when the democratic process was brutally interrupted in January 1996. When a civilian government was returned following democratic elections in November 1999, international cooperation recommenced as stated in the US State Department Report for 2000: “The temporary suspension of foreign assistance in 1999 limited the Government’s ability to fulfil its commitments to former rebel areas. During the year, foreign assistance resumed, and the region is receiving assistance again.”⁶¹

Despite the temporary suspension, not all assistance was stopped following the two *coups d’état*. For instance, in September 1999, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) announced that some 70,000 people in the northern areas of Tahoua and Agadez would receive assistance totalling 280,000 Euros which would be distributed through agencies such as Action Contre la Faim and Première Urgence. “This amount marks the fourth stage of help since 1997 in support of the peace process”, an ECHO source stated.⁶² The return to democratic order also encouraged some new initiatives designed to help the

⁵⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The State of the World’s Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda*, Geneva, 1997, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld> [accessed 30 May 2001], Box 4.1: The Tuareg Repatriation

⁶⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Appeal*

⁶¹ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000: Niger*, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001

⁶² United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, Niger: ECHO to Send Aid to Thousands in the North, 9 September 1999

reintegration of ex-combatants. For example in February 2000 the UNDP financed a training seminar in Tahoua for some 50 former Tuareg rebellion leaders which aimed to help them re-settle into civilian life by providing information about tax regulations and other commercial and administrative matters.⁶³

6.2. Current and Future Needs - the First-hand Views of Development Workers

Rather than listing particular projects, this paper sought to collect the views of those directly involved in relevant development work. All agreed on the following key points:

- Priority must be given to micro-projects which are more easily controlled and evaluated;
- It is essential to consult the population and take account of their customs and local practices before setting up a project;
- It is essential to avoid distinguishing between assistance to former refugees and returning displaced people and the resident population;
- Against the threat of a return to insecurity and violence, it remains vital that development efforts continue to avoid disappointing the community leaders and their people who believed the promises made by the government and who have yet to see the real economic benefits of peace.

The importance of well-targeted and well-managed micro projects is explained by the real fears that the money could be misappropriated or used to finance administrative overheads, salaries of experts etc. rather than benefiting the people. This can be achieved by avoiding too many intermediaries, which always increases the risk of possible misappropriation.

The need to consult the population was certainly well understood by the UNHCR in Mali throughout the refugee repatriation programme. In its global report for 1999, the UN agency stated: “In order to reach the largest number possible of returnees, the programme focused on community participation [in the distribution of aid and project formulation]”.⁶⁴

But this has not always been the case. The Popular Front for the Liberation of North Niger (Front Populaire de Libération Nord Niger), expressed its frustration in October 1998 in its report on NGO activity:

We have adopted decentralization as one of our objectives in developing our respective regions to enable us to deal directly with the donors. We will no longer accept any intermediaries. We remind NGOs of two things:

- Development in pastoral areas cannot be done by an NGO parachuted in without the populations’ consent;
- When it comes to technical interventions, these must be done in agreement with the populations in a context of consultation and partnership.⁶⁵

⁶³ *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Niger: Former Tuareg Rebels Attend Training Workshop on Social Reintegration, quoting *PANA*, Dakar, 8 February 2000

⁶⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Report*

⁶⁵ Front Populaire de Libération Nord Niger, *Rapport de gestion des projets et ONG intervenant dans l’Azawak*, 15 October 1998 (unpublished document)

For a better understanding of the current needs of the population, we have sought the views of some people directly involved in development work in Niger and Mali, in the hope that their experiences will enlighten future projects. Their views are grouped under the three basic needs which the different zones have in common.

6.2.1. The Provision of Water

Water is essential for animal husbandry and agriculture as well as the creation of schools and health centres, and in its repatriation programme in Mali the UNHCR made water provision one of its priorities. “Projects in the water sector were by far the most important input provided by UNHCR. They involved the construction of 131 wells and 57 boreholes and the installation of 72 water pumps in more than 200 sites.”⁶⁶

The issue of water is currently particularly pertinent, especially in Niger, as the risks of drought could soon re-emerge. Adouma Abdourahmane, a Nigerien Tuareg and a geography graduate, who has invested in an agricultural plot of two hectares 180 km from Agadez, expresses his anxieties: “Last year it rained very little and this year if it does not rain in June, July or August, it will be catastrophic. Some are already imagining a return to the cycles of drought which decimated the region in the 1970s and 1980s.”⁶⁷ The water problems will mean that some nomads will return into exile, as Alhassane Ag Solimane notes: “As it did not rain, there were no crops and the price of a sack of millet rose enormously, so during 2000 some people returned to Libya and Algeria.”⁶⁸

The low rainfall last year in Niger has already had a serious impact because the inadequate food reserves and the increasing food prices have meant that thousands of people have fled towards the towns. *Le Républicain* (Niamey), in an article with the alarming title “Famine threatens”, stated in April 2001 that some 4,000 villages spread across the north, east and south of the country “have become ghost villages as people have evacuated them”. The newspaper reported that whole families fleeing the famine “have undertaken the long dangerous walk towards urban centres or into neighbouring countries.”⁶⁹ The Nigerien government aims to send some 40,000 tonnes of food supplies to the affected areas, but that would not even cover half of the needs, so international assistance is urgently required.

In Mali, the situation seems less worrying at the moment, even though Odile Hardy noted in March 2001 that in the region of Kidal “the nomads are obliged to change their routes and they are living from 1999 pastures which were so well flooded that even though they are now dry, the animals can still feed there. But, if it does not rain this year, the problem will be dramatic.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Report*

⁶⁷ Abdourahmane, A., Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁶⁸ Ag Solimane, A. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁶⁹ Allakaye, J.S., La famine menace, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 19 April 2001

⁷⁰ Hardy, O. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

UN agencies and many NGOs are active in finding and digging wells but the needs are also great, as Adouma Abdourahmane states:

The people do not have the means to cement the wells even though cement is essential. They can dig their own wells, but they need cement. The donors, especially the German and French assistance agencies, have set up “Projet - Nord Niger” together with implementing NGOs like Première Urgence. But that is just a drop in the ocean. Sometimes the studies take a long time and much money is spent on vehicles and experts.⁷¹

It is also important to take into account sociological and local cultural issues, as Marie Béjel emphasizes: “If an NGO arrives somewhere and builds a rural well without involving the local people, when it ceases to work, they will not repair it because they believe it belongs to the person who built it. So, they must get the local people involved with the digging of the wells so they feel it is theirs which gives them the right to repair it.”⁷²

Another problem can arise if the local attitudes to land are not respected, as Alhassane Ag Solimane explains: “The nomadic Tuaregs stay on the same territory. When an NGO proposes a well, they may oppose the project because the new water source will attract people from afar with their herds which would eat their pastures. You must look at each traditional encampment and provide them with their own well. The ideal situation would be for each territory to have its own well.”⁷³

It is not just a question of showing respect for the local people. These issues have resulted in the failure of a project which can swallow large sums of money with very disappointing results.

6.2.2. Education

As mentioned above, for many years nomadic families have refused education for their children, but the challenge of the droughts has made them realize how important it is for them to train for official and professional roles and to adapt to modern living conditions. The advantages have become all the more apparent with the arrival of decentralization, which has already been introduced in Mali. Some Tuaregs have been elected to hold important administrative responsibilities but some are illiterate and only speak Tamachek. This means they cannot read administrative papers without the assistance of advisors from the South or those from the sedentary groups who have been educated.

Several UN agencies and NGOs have worked on developing educational structures. The following examples illustrate two different approaches to the needs of nomadic populations.

⁷¹ Abdourahmane, A., Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁷² Béjel, M. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁷³ Ag Solimane, A. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

Around 1993, in Niger in the region of Agadez, the Association Touaregs led by Marie Béjel started a system of schools for rural nomadic and semi-nomadic children. They chose mobile schools so that the children did not have to move away from their families, as this had proved a problem in the past. In an April 2001 report, this Association stated: “The classrooms can be put up and taken down easily, they are intended to move and function wherever the encampments go. There is no board included. All children living within 4 km of the school can attend and still benefit from a normal family life while learning about the economic activities of their parents.”⁷⁴

By contrast, in Mali’s Kidal region, another association, The Children of Adrar des Iforas (Les Enfants de l’Adrar des Iforas) led by Odile Hardy has opted for a residential school. They reject a mobile school for a number of reasons. Firstly, according to the association’s leaders: “nomadic families either move alone or with two or three other families, rarely more... And a mobile school can only hold a small number of children.” Above all, according to this Association: “a school set up in the middle or near to an encampment cannot concentrate on studying, because the family is close by. In the African context, children are usually called upon by their parents to undertake daily tasks. In a mobile classroom, the children would find it difficult to concentrate on studying.”⁷⁵

However in both the cases mentioned above, the education provided is radically different from the colonial model because, although the courses are modelled on the national curriculum of the state schools in Mali or Niger, they are given by local teachers who can teach the pupils in both French and Tamachek. The aim is not to assimilate them into the dominant and alien culture, but to preserve the identity of the nomadic populations and the basic values of their culture.

6.2.3. Health Needs

The need for health infrastructures and personnel, which is already quite acute throughout Mali and Niger, is all the more pressing in the remote northern and eastern districts which have had less money invested in health provisions. There are few rural health centres, so people need to travel long distances for treatment, and there are few trained staff.

Alhassane Ag Solimane with his long experience with AMI in the region of Agadez, Niger said: “We must now turn our attention to providing bush health centres and mobile health personnel who would move on camels and get access to the sick.”⁷⁶

Currently, sick people in remote areas have little access to medical help. In the vast region of Aïr in Niger, there are some 30 state registered nurses but they do not travel around and people need to pay for their services. To be effective, these services need to become much more mobile. In its April 2001 report, the Association Touaregs stated: “According to our information, there are two independent nurses living in Aïr [northern region of Niger which

⁷⁴ Association Touaregs, Les projets de l’association Touaregs: document de synthèse, April 2001 (unpublished document)

⁷⁵ Enfants de l’Adrar des Iforas, Groupe scolaire pilote de Tinzaouaten, April 2001 (unpublished document)

⁷⁶ Ag Solimane, A. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

includes the zone of Agadez] who care for the region's population by travelling on camels and motorcycles to respond to emergencies [which takes at least 48 hours]."⁷⁷ The services of these two nurses and the medicines they provide are free and their mobility allows them to reach people in remote areas where there are no other medical provisions.

The needs are huge and there is no hope that central government can provide assistance, as an article in a Nigerien newspaper *Alternative* shows:

“There are still insufficient, even derisory, means to provide a health service of appropriate quality in the region [of Agadez]. ‘We need donors who can support our efforts... The Departmental Health Directorate and the other health authorities are functioning neither organizationally, nor from the point of view of finances, organizational, infrastructure and logistics’, emphasizes the deputy departmental director of health, M. Djadi Dan Baki.”⁷⁸

This view highlights how important it is that aid agencies help the whole population of these remote areas and do not discriminate between returning refugees or displaced people and the resident population who all suffer from the same infrastructural problems.

Some NGOs, like AMI, are active in both Mali and Niger. In Niger, they have trained midwives and refurbished the maternity hospital in Agadez. In Mali, they have created a dispensary in Kidal and trained nurses in Bamako.

The support of international aid agencies is even more essential in Mali where health facilities are now the responsibility of local authorities who are very poorly resourced, as a result of decentralization. In October 2000 an article in *Le Républicain* (Bamako) said: “Some rural communities do not even have an appropriate building where the executive body can carry out its functions.”⁷⁹

The aid agencies must take into account the new factor of decentralization and ensure that their activities assist the local authorities in their huge responsibility for local development. The WFP has taken note of this as they state in their Mali Country Programme report (1999-2002) the necessity “to gear the strategies and facilities of the country programme to the decentralization process which is designed to improve coordinating the peoples and encouraging them to participate more broadly. The new decentralized communities have substantial powers regarding food security, education and healthcare.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Association Touaregs

⁷⁸ Cissé, S.M., Santé publique à Agadez: le calvaire des populations, *Alternative*, 15 September 2000

⁷⁹ Sanogo, K., Décentralisation: un processus pour tous, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 27 October 2000

⁸⁰ World Food Programme, *Field Operations: Mali: Objectives of WFP Assistance*, Rome, December 2000. <http://www.wfp.org/mali> [accessed 30 May 2001]

6.3. The Dangers Inherent in Withdrawal

At all levels, the needs remain vast and if the current stability is not to be threatened, it is essential that the aid agencies continue to invest in their development projects. Some agencies have been tempted to withdraw either temporarily or permanently from these remote regions of Niger and Mali, either for internal financial considerations or because of the continuing insecurity in the region or because they are unhappy about the aid being misappropriated and not reaching those in need.

This last issue seems to explain the partial withdrawal of the WFP which was financing school canteens in northern Niger. This programme is essential because, without the canteens, the children of nomadic families are likely to be deprived of food as their families who are with their herds cannot provide it. The WFP underlined the importance of this project in their own Country Programme Report 1999-2002 for Niger: “WFP aid to the education sector through school canteens is underpinning this human resource development effort. The aim is to guarantee basic education to the children in the nomadic and transhumant areas and equip them with the necessary knowledge to enable them to take part in the country’s social and economic development.”⁸¹

However, towards the end of 2000 WFP stopped providing food at some school canteens in northern Niger after a large amount of money was apparently embezzled. The withdrawal of this aid, although it has not been effected across the whole country, could have disastrous consequences, as Adouma Abdourahmane confirms: “If the WFP really does withdraw, the schools will have to close and the level of school attendance will drop, because we can create the schools, but without the canteen, there will be no pupils.”⁸²

The other main reason for the temporary withdrawal of some NGOs, and for the hesitation of others to get involved, is the so-called “residual” violence which has not been quelled either in Mali or Niger. In 1999, the American NGO, Care International, withdrew for several months from northern Niger because of security problems. Similarly in 1998 in the Gao region of Mali, the French NGO, Action contre la Faim, withdrew for a while following an attack on one of its members by “bandits”.⁸³

In this context, perhaps the most serious incident in recent years was the kidnapping in 1997 of a Canadian volunteer, Serge L’Archer, who was held for two months by Toubous rebels in Kawar, north-eastern Niger. Obviously, such events will dissuade some NGOs from intervening, despite the urgent need for development in these regions, as journalist Moussa Kaka stated in June 2000: “For peace to return to Kawar, the salt mines and palm plantations of Séguidine need to be reopened, even though some donors still have the painful memory of one Canadian volunteer who was taken hostage while fighting against malnutrition in the vast region of Kawar.”⁸⁴

⁸¹ World Food Programme, *Field Operations: Niger: Objectives of WFP Assistance*, Rome, December 2000, <http://www.wfp.org/niger>[accessed 30 May 2001]

⁸² Abdourahmane, A. Personal interview, Paris, March 2001

⁸³ United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, Mali: French NGO Suspends Operations, 23 March 1998

⁸⁴ Kaka, M., Tous les fronts bientôt désarmés

In 1999, the UNHCR has also publicly acknowledged in their funding appeal for Mali that “the presence of bandits, who are often unemployed ex-combatants, discourages development initiatives and external support.” However, in the same report this UN body warns against the temptation of aid agencies to disengage: “Banditry in the northeast threatens security, but inaction would represent an even greater threat to peace. If returnee communities in Gao and Kidal are not given assistance to support their self-sufficiency and promote reconciliation, the tensions that resulted in armed conflict in the early 1990s could recur.”⁸⁵

7. Conclusion

The resolution of the conflicts following the rebellions in Mali and Niger are generally considered to be a success. This is indeed true if they are compared with other African conflicts with separatist demands or calls for greater autonomy, like those still raging in Casamance (southern Senegal) or southern Sudan. It could be said with some satisfaction that the conflicts in Mali and Niger have found a peaceful resolution. This success is due to the mediation of other countries and the willingness of the parties to accept a compromise based on the hope that national unity can be preserved while allowing the forgotten northern and eastern regions of these countries to gain from the economic development not as yet experienced.

Ten years after the outbreak of these rebellions, and despite an apparent calm, the situation remains fragile because the populations involved have not yet seen the fruits of the peace. These rebellions of the early 1990s took the governments of Mali and Niger, and also the international community, by surprise. Lessons must be learned from that experience to avoid new problems, which could lead to a further exodus.

We have seen that these exoduses were caused by droughts and by armed protest movements born out of the frustration of those populations who feel left out and allege aid was appropriated by dishonest officials. These risks are still present, even if currently dormant. An urgent response from the international community is needed to deal with the threat of drought and the recent large-scale movements of people who are the first to be fleeing food shortages in Niger. As for the persistent frustration of the population, this is obvious to all observers who have recently visited the two countries. Even in Mali, where decentralization has already been implemented, the local population has not seen the promised development, which the political changes were expected to bring because of the lack of resources granted to the newly elected officials.

The international community, which has been heavily involved in financing programmes to help with the reintegration of refugees and ex-combatants, must continue its efforts and not assume that the current stability has been permanently won. Indeed, it does not seem likely, in the immediate future at least, that we will again see well organized rebel fronts. But the example of Ibrahim Bahanga’s group in Mali in late 2000 shows that situations can deteriorate very rapidly and the vicious cycle of attacks, army reprisals and self-defence militia can quickly resume.

⁸⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *1999 Global Appeal*

The international aid agencies must take into account the potential danger and must pursue its efforts in the field to ensure that decentralization, which has arrived in Mali and which might be on the horizon in Niger, brings with it the promised development which convinced the rebel fronts to renounce violence and lay down their weapons for good. For the moment, most of the affected populations see the rebellion as something in the past and acknowledge that the priority is now to develop their region. But it must be remembered that all the former players in the armed conflict, especially the ex-rebels themselves and the former self-defence militias, have retained a large proportion of their arms. If the much awaited economic developments do not arrive soon, the risk of renewed violence cannot be ruled out.

8. Bibliography

Agence France Presse, Mali: Libération de dix militaires kidnappés dans le nord, 25 February 2001

_____, Mali: Recherches pour retrouver quatre militaires enlevés dans le nord, 5 December 2000

_____, Burkina Faso: Les Touaregs réfugiés au Burkina Faso hésitent à rentrer au Mali, 25 December 1996

_____, Niger: L'ex-rébellion touarègue 'heureuse' du coup d'Etat, 30 January 1996

_____, Niger: Le Président Ousmane opposé à la 'partition' du pays, 6 March 1994

_____, Mali: Un dirigeant touareg demande un statut particulier pour les régions du Nord, 30 July 1991

_____, Mali: Le problème touareg reste 'l'une des plaies majeures de notre pays', selon le président Touré, 11 July 1991

Allakaye, J.S., La famine menace, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 19 April 2001

Associated Press, McKenzie G., Nigerien Warriors Growing Restless, 11 September 1999

Association Touaregs, Les projets de l'Association Touaregs: document de synthèse, April 2001 (unpublished document)

Baqué, P., Nouvel enlèvement des espoirs de paix dans le conflit touareg au Mali, *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1995

BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, Niger: Disarmament of Armed Groups Reaches Final Stage, quoting *La Voix du Sahel*, 6 June 2000

_____, Niger: Former Tuareg Rebels Attend Training Workshop on Social Reintegration, quoting PANA, Dakar, 8 February 2000

Boilley, P., *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh: Dépendances et révoltes*, Paris: Karthala, 1999

_____, Mali: *Stabilité du Nord-Mali: Des responsabilités partagées*, WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, May 1999 (UNHCR/CDR REF WORLD Databases)

Cheikh A. B., Le pacte national: deux ans après, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 26 January 1994

Cheikna H. S., Armée: Faut-il faire confiance aux rebelles intégrés? *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 27 September 1995

Cissé, S. M., Santé publique à Agadez: le calvaire des populations, *Alternative*, 15 September 2000

Claudot-Hawad, H., 'Négrafricanisme' et racisme, *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 1995

Collectif des ex-combattants de l'ex-résistance armée touareg, Lettre au Président de la République du Niger, 20 November 2000 (unpublished document)

Coordination de la résistance armée, *Programme-cadre de la résistance*, Niamey, 1994

De Barrin, J., Des centaines de Touaregs tués au Niger, *Le Monde*, 15 June 1990

Le dernier grand retour des réfugiés touaregs du Burkina Faso vers le Mali, *Afrique Express*, 30 October 1997

Document-cadre de la communauté touareg de souche noire, March 1994 (unpublished document)

Dramé T., Question touareg: la communauté internationale veut-elle la paix?, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 16 September 1992

Enfants de l'Adrar des Iforas, Groupe scolaire pilote de Tinzaouaten, April 2001 (unpublished document)

Front Populaire de Libération Nord Niger, Rapport de gestion des projets et ONG intervenant dans l'Azawak, 15 October 1998 (unpublished document)

Geslin, J-D., La paix retrouvée, *Jeune Afrique*, 17-23 November 1998

Grégoire E., *Touaregs du Niger: le destin d'un mythe*, Paris: Karthala, 1999

Hardy, Y., Mali: Les Touaregs ont le blues, *Croissance*, April-May 2001

Hardy, O., Détails des événements récents survenus dans le Nord du Mali, February 2001 (unpublished document)

Kaka, M., Désarmement des fronts armés, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 8-14 June 2000

_____ , Tous les fronts bientôt désarmés, *Le Républicain*, [Niamey], 1-7 June 2000

_____ , La rébellion se dévoile, *Le Républicain* [Niamey], 27 February 1992

Mouvement populaire de l'Azaouad (MPA) , Dossier de presse: Touaregs du Mali, 7 May 1992 (unpublished document)

Niger: les réfugiés attendront..., *Jeune Afrique*, 3-9 March 1998

Nous ne sommes redevables de rien à la Libye, *Le Monde*, 30 September 1990

Ramir, S., Touaregs au Niger: entre révolte et espoir, *L'autre journal*, No. 7, December 1990

Sangaré, B., Touaregs: 'La faim est pire que la guerre', *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 23 October 1996

Sanogo, K., Décentralisation: un processus pour tous, *Le Républicain* [Bamako], 27 October 2000

Sotinel, T., Ganda Koye, ou la revanche des paysans, *Le Monde*, 31 January 1996

Sperl, S., *International Refugee Aid and Social Change in Northern Mali*, New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 22. Geneva: UNHCR, July 2000

Tuareg Repatriation Dubbed Success Story, *Conflict Watch*, May 1997

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *2001 Global Appeal*, Geneva, December 2000, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001]

_____ , *1999 Global Report*, Geneva, June 2000, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001]

_____ , *1999 Global Appeal*, Geneva, December 1998, <http://www.unhcr.org/fdrs/appeals.htm> [accessed 30 May 2001]

_____ , *The State of the World's Refugees: A Humanitarian Agenda*, Geneva, 1997, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/> [accessed 30 May 2001]

United Nations Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, Niger: ECHO to Send Aid to Thousands in the North, 9 September 1999

_____ , Mali: UNHCR Wraps Up Its Operations in the North, 25 June 1999

_____ , Mali: French NGO Suspends Operations, 23 March 1998

United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000: Niger*, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001

World Food Programme, *Field Operations: Mali: Objectives of WFP Assistance*, Rome, December 2000, <http://www.wfp.org/mali> [accessed 30 May 2001]

_____, *Field Operations: Niger: Objectives of WFP Assistance*, Rome, December 2000, <http://www.wfp.org/niger> [accessed 30 May 2001]