

Introduction

1. International Communities Organisation (ICO), in its capacity holding Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 2021, believes communities can come together and achieve a peace, based not on one group's views prevailing over another, but by constructing a shared vision for a better future. ICO is independent, neutral, and dedicated to the protection of minority rights.
2. ICO places particular emphasis on ensuring that the voices of local stakeholders are heard. Therefore, this ICO report on Burkina Faso for the fourth cycle of Universal Periodic Review brings local views on minority rights to the attention of the United Nations, and the international community more broadly.
3. In the third cycle of Universal Periodic Review, Burkina Faso received 204 recommendations. It supported 184 of these recommendations and noted the remaining 20.
4. The issues occurring most often in these recommendations have been worsened by the current state of the country as a result of the two military coups of 2022, which have increased the insecurity of minorities within Burkina Faso. Women, children and the Fulani population are the most affected by this political instability where armed groups and government armed forces committed violations of international humanitarian law. These issues are already known by the international community and the United Nations who also urge the investigation of the armed conflict and put a stop to the local violence.
5. This report will cover the problems faced by the Fulani population and women, with the support of ICO's interviews with local stakeholders, in order to bring greater attention to the increased threats that minority communities in Burkina Faso face.

The Fulani population

6. The Fulani ethnic group is an agro-pastoral community residing especially in the north of Burkina Faso. In spite of the *de jure* prohibition of discrimination in the national constitution, its de facto manifestation for the Fulani population is pervasive. Members of the Fulani ethnic group have complained of government negligence, prejudice, and mistreatment, particularly at the hands of security personnel and militias. After the military seized control in January 2022, the new interim government enlisted civilians into armed forces to combat non-state armed groups. Reports from local stakeholders suggest that these civilian forces disproportionately persecute Fulani people. Military rule has also abolished protections provided by the law.
7. Although their stigmatisation has always been an issue, organisations studying the effects of armed conflict have noted that the rise in targeted attacks is a sign of the present counter-terrorism campaign being waged against armed groups. The Fulani population have reportedly been the target of extrajudicial killings. This is due to the belief that they are associated with armed groups operating in the region most affected by armed conflict.
8. According to ICO interviews with local stakeholders, as a result of their refusal of Western education, the Fulani community is under-represented in any form of decision-making process, such as public administration and the armed forces.

9. For a long time, conflicts have always existed between farmers and pastoralists in Burkina Faso. Therefore, the nomadic lifestyle of Fulani people (breeders) exposes them to conflict in the state where agriculture is the primary industry. The issue has worsened due to climate change, which is also robbing farmers and herders of their sources of income. As tensions have grown, so has the armed conflict that has been raging in these regions for almost a decade.
10. Due to their stateless status, members of the Fulani ethnic group find themselves hostages to non-state armed groups According to local stakeholders: “they find themselves caught in the fire of the FDS-VDP who commit many abuses on this community, and under the fire of non-state armed groups who see them as a recruitment pool”.
11. Due to rising violence and the return of military control in 2022, the working space for NGOs and human rights organisations has significantly shrunk. Communities, camps for displaced people, and major portions of the country are frequently cut off from state authorities and from civic support mechanisms. Particularly in Northern Burkina Faso, where armed conflict is at its worst, access for humanitarian aid is restricted.

Therefore, interviewed stakeholders advise the United Nations to:

12. Reduce stigmatisation of the Fulani ethnic group through education and awareness-raising development projects regarding armed violence to illustrate how they are also hostages/ victims of this violence.
13. Encourage their participation in the spheres of political, administrative and economic decision-making to ensure their right to justice.
14. Establish sanction measures by the state for the armed groups, making sure to differentiate between armed terrorist actors and the wider Fulani population who currently has no access to justice.
15. Encourage respect for rule of law and due process. One of the issues is that the state indiscriminately punishes Fulani people, without fair trial and justice; at the mere "suspicion" that someone is affiliated with state armed groups.
16. Educate and encourage the Fulani community to expand their values relating to work, as their community prominently relies on livestock farming that is not accessible anymore due to climate change and its effects on the area.

Women

17. With the increase in physical insecurity brought on by extremist groups, gender-based violence has grown more pervasive and difficult to address. The United Nations Population Fund estimated that more than 660,000 people will need protection from sexual assault and rape. Displaced women fleeing extremist violence have been targeted by Islamist militant groups, and the number of sexual assault cases has risen drastically in the Centre North region.
18. Women are major victims of sexual violence, and there have been documented assaults in IDP camps and IDP sites. This intersectionality is essential to keep in mind as we compare issues affecting minority communities with those affecting women.

Women are more prone to experiencing violence. In cases concerning inheritance and family rights, women face discrimination. Early marriage is still a problem, particularly in the North. FGM is still practiced, albeit less frequently than in the past. Despite government initiatives to address it, domestic violence is still an issue.

19. UNICEF reported that 4,258 schools were closed or non-functioning in September 2022 due to the armed conflict in the country. According to local stakeholders, the lack of access to education for young girls and women remains a major challenge. Even though there have been programmes campaigning for women's education, most of them are limited to primary or secondary education.
20. Only 64% of girls in Burkina Faso can go to school, and many must leave to get married or take on domestic work. Even the most basic information on sexual and reproductive health is inaccessible to most girls. The country has one of the highest rates of maternal mortality – when a woman dies as a result of her pregnancy – in the world. One in every 22 women will die simply from getting pregnant.
21. Due to their inaccessibility to education, women do not enjoy full access to their right to natural resources (land in particular), economic opportunities or political and administrative representation.
22. The statutory framework fails to secure equal rights for a considerable percentage of women in the country. The Code of Persons and Family does not apply to women married under customary law. Consequently, under customary law, widows often cannot inherit from their husbands, and the daughters are ignored because they are expected to acquire assets through marriage.

Therefore, the local stakeholders advise the United Nations to:

23. Continue the support for educational programs for women. Education is shown to be the main factor in decreasing the cases of FGM and it proves to be the most powerful tool in empowering women with the knowledge of their rights as people and citizens.
24. Implement and financially support organisations for the protection of women victims of gender-based violence.
25. Implement legislation empowering women to own and benefit from their own land and inheritance.
26. Support programmes pushing for representation of women in political and administrative positions.

Conclusion

27. Due to the security instability in Burkina Faso at the time, many more issues that disproportionately affect minorities arise, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to food, the right to justice and the right to development.
28. However, the primary focus of this ICO report has been to draw attention to the current issues that minorities are facing in Burkina Faso with the supporting statements of the interviewed local stakeholders. It urges the UN to be mindful of the recommendations submitted regarding the issues faced by the women and the Fulani ethnic group in Burkina Faso.
29. Whilst the UN already has a good understanding that above mentioned rights are impeded, we urge the UN to look at the insights of our report to show not necessarily

what the issues are or how they are developing, but to especially showcase how local stakeholders desire these to be addressed.