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**Burkina Faso**

# **Burkina Faso: Junta steps up repression**

- IV Online magazine - 2024 - IV598 - November 2024 -

Publication date: Sunday 17 November 2024

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**To make up for its inability to improve the security situation in Burkina Faso, the ruling junta is stepping up its repressive course. On 24 August, nearly 400 civilians were killed by jihadists in the village of Barsalogho in north-central Burkina Faso. This tragedy sheds a harsh light on the real situation in the country, far removed from the triumphalist rhetoric of the putschists.**

## Civilians put to the sword

It was the head of the junta himself, Ibrahim Traoré, who demanded that trenches be created around villages that had fallen victim to Islamist attacks. As the villagers of Barsalogho - obeying the orders of the military threatened by reprisals if they did not - were digging, they came under fire from militiamen of the al-Qaeda affiliated Groupe de soutien à l'islam et aux musulmans (GSIM – Support Group for Islam and Muslims). The jihadists' message was clear: any civilian collaborating with the security forces is a potential target. In rural communes such as Barsalogho, villagers are caught in a vice between the army and the jihadists, both of whom have little regard for the lives of Burkinabes.

Especially as the authorities have largely blurred the boundaries between the military and civilians with the introduction of the Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP – Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland). They are made up of citizens who are recruited with basic training and weapons and who are supposed to defend their village.

## Plots everywhere

Human Rights Watch estimates that 6,000 people were murdered in 2024, a record number of victims that illustrates the powerlessness of the ruling military. It will be recalled that the justification for the coup was the previous government's inability to respond effectively to armed attacks by Islamists.

The authorities claim that the Barsalogho massacre was the sign of a multi-pronged plot to destabilise the regime, hatched by the opposition and involving officers, members of the former regime, journalists and Western spies.

## Justice nowhere

This was a pretext for stepping up a crackdown on all dissenting voices. Judicial personnel who have worked on cases involving people supporting the junta find themselves forcibly conscripted into the VDP. Such is the case of the judge in Ziniaré in charge of the case of a person close to the government implicated in the accident at an illegal mine that caused the death of nearly 60 people, or the journalist Serge Oulon. In an article, he denounced the embezzlement of funds by a captain in the Burkina Faso army.

A rapid intervention communications battalion (BIR-C) has even been set up to arrest anyone who challenges the

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government. Mahamoudou Sana, the Minister of Security, encourages the population to denounce bad citizens. As for opponents in exile, the junta attacks their family members. Barsalogho bears witness to the bankruptcy and repressive security policy of the junta, whose survival depends more and more on their Russian protector.

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