

Annex III: Letter from the Humanitarian Action Ministry

The following is an unofficial translation of a French letter received by Human Rights Watch on May 18, 2020, in response to a letter sent by Human Rights Watch on April 20, 2020.

May 18, 2020

Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, Family and Humanitarian Action
Burkina Faso

The Minister to: Ms. Lauren Seibert, researcher at Human Rights Watch, New York

CC: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

Ouagadougou

RE: Responses from the Ministry of Women, National Solidarity, Family, and Humanitarian Action (MFSNFAH) to HRW's concerns about attacks on teachers, students and schools in Burkina Faso

Madame,

By a letter dated April 20, 2020, His Excellency the Ambassador of Burkina Faso to the United States of America, Washington DC, brought to the attention of my [ministry] an email from your organization relating to its upcoming report on attacks perpetrated by “armed Islamist groups” against teachers, students and schools between 2017 and 2020 and the use of certain schools for military purposes in Burkina Faso. The organization requested answers to questions on the following points: 1) the efforts of the Government; 2) support for victims; 3) psychosocial support for students; 4) child protection units, and 5) international support.

I have the honor to send you the elements of response from my [ministry] relating to the abovementioned points of concern raised. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to HRW for its interest in the worrying issue of terrorist attacks targeting teachers, students and schools in Burkina Faso. I have no doubt that our responses and observations will be largely considered in your organization's upcoming report.

Please accept, Madame, the expression of my highest consideration.

Hélène Marie Laurence ILBOUDO / MARCHAL

[The Minister]

Attached: Responses from MFSNFAH to HRW’s concerns about attacks targeting teachers, students and schools in Burkina Faso.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (HRW)

May 2020

1. GOVERNMENT EFFORTS: Are there any additional measures the government has taken to address the issues Human Rights Watch has identified that you would like to highlight?

The Humanitarian Action [ministry] carried out several actions during the period concerned.

These include:

- Capacity-building of operational actors (social workers, NGO staff, Red Cross and Associations) on psychosocial care in emergency situations;
- The deployment of a team of psychologists to handle cases in certain Internally Displaced Persons sites;
- The establishment of child-friendly spaces run by social workers, which contributes to providing psychosocial support to children in distress.

In addition to these actions, since December 2019, the Government of Burkina Faso has participated in the activation of Clusters in response to the humanitarian situation. This has favored:

- A change in name from “subgroup on child protection in emergencies” to “sub-cluster on child protection in emergencies.” This group, coordinated by the Humanitarian Action Ministry, meets periodically to take stock of developments in the humanitarian situation, gaps in child protection and recommendations for improving the situation of children to be implemented by the actors;

- The establishment of a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Working Group (*Groupe de travail Santé mentale et soutien psychosocial, SMSPS*). Certain [departments] of the Humanitarian Action Ministry, in particular the General Directorate for Family and Children [*Direction Générale de la Famille et de l'Enfant, DGFE*], are stakeholders in this working group, which brings together humanitarian organizations and promotes the strengthening of provision of mental health care and the promotion of psychosocial well-being. The establishment of this group is intended to promote synergy between different interventions and to reinforce coverage of the needs of affected populations, including education workers and students, in a more strategic way.

Regarding standard-setting, we note:

- The adoption of Decree no. 2019-0306/PRES/PM/MINEFID/MFPTPS/MATD/MDNAC of April 15, 2019 relating to the compensation of civil servants who have suffered [harm or losses] in terrorist attacks during the exercise of or as a result of the exercise of their duties. This text provides for the medical care of civil servants, a financial allowance of 10,000,000 FCFA [US \$16,500] to the beneficiaries of the civil servants concerned, etc.
- The implementation of Law No. 022-2006/AN of November 16, 2006 on the system for the prevention and reparation of professional risks applicable to civil servants, soldiers and magistrates, for which the management of the system is entrusted to the Autonomous Pension Fund for Civil Servants (*Caisse Autonome de Retraite des Fonctionnaires, CARFO*). The Humanitarian Action Ministry takes part in the work of the Health Committee for examining requests.

2. SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS: What steps has your ministry taken to ensure that teachers and school administrators who are victims of attacks receive not only timely, appropriate, and subsidized medical care and psychosocial support, but also longer-term follow up and support?

The Humanitarian Action ministry, through its structure known as the “National Solidarity Fund” (*Fonds National de Solidarité*), assumes responsibility for medical costs, medical evacuations and psychological support for victims of terrorist attacks. We note in particular:

- Financial support for school fees in the amount of 638,000 FCFA [US \$1,050] and school kits for the children of 10 families of teachers who died as a result of terrorism in 2018 and 2019;
- Financial support in a lump sum of 1,000,000 francs CFA [\$1,650] to the families of 05 deceased teachers in 2019.

Are there currently any systems or protocols in place to ensure timely reporting and response to attacks on schools and teachers? How does your ministry engage with the Education ministry on this issue?

Mechanisms or protocols exist for the reporting of humanitarian emergencies, including attacks on schools and teachers, and the rapid implementation of responses. These include:

- The National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation [*Conseil national de secours d'urgence et de réhabilitation*, CONASUR], chaired by the Humanitarian Action Ministry, whose branches at regional, provincial and departmental [commune] levels provide information on the massive displacement of populations following attacks. This allows the rapid implementation of the humanitarian response in collaboration with the Education Ministry through its Technical Secretariat for Education in Emergencies [*Secrétariat Technique de l'Education en Situation d'Urgence*, ST-ESU];
- A helpline for children including the *numéro vert* [free phone number] 116 accessible by the three (03) mobile telephone networks existing in the country. This toll-free number allows for [children to be heard] in relation to situations of violence, counseling, psychosocial support and referral to appropriate structures for care;
- Child protection networks currently made up of 45 provincial networks and 57 departmental networks [within the “communes”], for a total of 102 networks. Like the Child Protection Working Group [*Groupe de travail pour la protection de l'enfance*, GTPE] at the national level, regional groups are being set up to give impetus to community child protection networks and units, concerning which a reference document helps to harmonize practices on the ground at [worker] level;
- Close relations with the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages (MENAPLN) on various issues (education of children in difficulty, sponsorship of orphans and other vulnerable children, education of

internally displaced children, children removed from gold mining sites, etc.). MENAPLN's decentralized [local] structures are also members of child protection networks.

MENAPLN and the Humanitarian Action Ministry are also collaborating on various other aspects. This is the case when developing various documents concerning child protection, such as the National Child Protection Strategy (SNPE 2020-2024), which takes into account the issue of child protection in emergencies.

3. PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS: What steps has your ministry taken to provide psychosocial support to students who experienced attacks on schools, and in which provinces have these efforts been implemented?

The measures taken to provide psychosocial support to students include, among others:

- The establishment of [217] child-friendly spaces in the Centre-Nord (Sanmentenga, Bam, Namentenga), Plateau-Central (Ganzourgou), and Sahel (Seno, Oudalan, Soum) regions;
- Capacity-building on child protection in emergencies for 341 education supervisors, teachers and canteen workers. The training sessions took place from August 7 to 9, 2019 in the Nord (Ouahigouya), Sahel (Djibo and Gorom-Gorom), Centre-Nord (Kaya), and Est (Fada N'Gourma) regions;
- Training of social workers in case management, in order to allow for qualitative care of children who are victims or at risk of violence in the 45 provinces;
- The training of 37 humanitarian actors (social workers, NGO and Association staff, etc.) on minimum standards for the protection of children in emergencies, from April 24 to 27, 2019, in Sanmatenga province, Centre-Nord region.

4. CHILD PROTECTION UNITS: What is the current status of the implementation of Community Child Protection Units in Burkina Faso? Have such units been set up in displacement camps and sites, and if so, which ones?

Since 2019, there has been a reference document validated by all those involved in child protection for the establishment of Community Child Protection Units (*Cellules communautaires de protection de l'enfant*, CCPE) in Burkina Faso. The key stages in the establishment of these CCPEs in the different communities have been determined in this

reference document. The development of a minimum package (basic modules) for capacity-building of CCPE members is underway.

However, before the adoption of this document, certain NGOs had [already] set up community child protection mechanisms, which should be restructured in accordance with the reference document. Those are :

- Terre des Hommes Lausanne (TdH/L) in the Nord and Boucle du Mouhoun regions;
- Plan International Burkina in the Sud-Ouest region;
- SOS Villages d'Enfants (VESOS) in the Hauts-Bassins region;
- Children Believe in the Est and Plateau-Central regions.

Nevertheless, community actors are organized at the various [displacement] sites (Barsalogo, Foube, ...) and support social workers in child protection. Also, community [activists] are engaged in educational and awareness-raising activities within child-friendly spaces.

5. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT: How can the international community best support your efforts to protect children and students impacted by attacks on schools and school closures?

International community support could be provided via:

- Establishment of emergency educational programs;
- Establishment of mobile school infrastructure (school tents);
- Provision of school supplies and teaching materials;
- Ensuring the safety of [school] premises, teaching staff, and students;
- Establishment of school canteens;
- Establishment of supply reserves (food and non-food) for parents of these children and students;
- Intensive advocacy in favor of substantial funding for the optimal functioning of child protection networks, as well as the deployment throughout the national territory of municipal [commune-level] networks and community units for child protection;
- Budget support for the establishment and operation of municipal social services in the 351 municipalities [communes] in the country;

- Technical and financial support for the integrated care of victims of or [those] at risk of violence;
- Improving the provision of care (training, construction, equipment, etc.) for mental health care and psychosocial support, or financial support to the implementation of this care and psychosocial support;
- Training of workers (teachers, school administrators, social workers, health workers, etc.) in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in schools, [and] in the support of victims (to refer them to [proper] care, either by providing them with basic advice, or by referring them to specialized mental health services).

Hélène Marie Laurence ILBOUDO / MARCHAL

[The Minister]