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Mali

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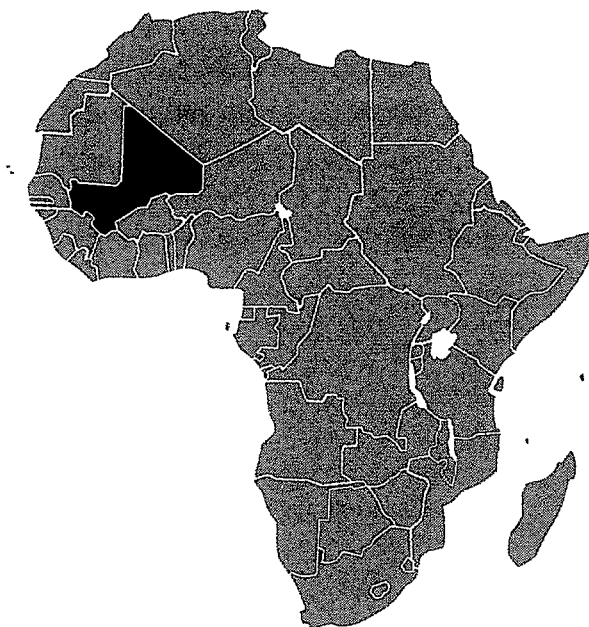
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Mali



The general political picture was one of a calm, uneventful year, characterised by political consensus on the one hand and ecological problems on the other. Both the cabinet and the National Assembly were run on the basis of consensus rather than as an arena for opposing parties, although there was *pro forma* representation of the opposition in all cabinet councils. Though President Touré was able to keep the political parties united and relatively sidelined, the first signs of a political shift were apparent in 2004, as the parties began to position themselves for the 2007 elections, and some protests occurred. The major problems in the country were of an ecological nature, namely the locust plague and a poor rainy season.

Domestic Politics

Internal politics remained characterised by Mali's peculiar features: this is a multiparty state in which political parties play little or no role. The current president, Amadou Toumani Touré, usually called ATT, came into office without any party affiliation as a result of a popular multiparty 'Mouvement de Soutien' for his nomination in 2002. His prime minister, Ahmed Mohamed Ag Hamani, also had no party affiliation, but the cabinet was made up of representatives of the major parties, such as RPM ('Rassemblement Populaire du Mali')

and Adema ('Parti Africain pour la Solidarité et la Justice', the party of the former president Konaré, now head of the AU Commission).

On 3 May, Touré appointed a new cabinet. Ousmane Issoufi Maïga, formerly minister of transport, became the new prime minister, many former ministers were reshuffled to new departments, while four new ministers were appointed, for a total of 28. The most important new appointments were Moctar Wanna, former career diplomat, to foreign affairs, Sadio Gassama, former army chief-of-staff, to interior security, and the economist Abubacar Traoré to finance. Culture, an important Malian export product, remained in the hands of movie director Cheick Oumar Sissoko, who is also president of the minority 'Parti pour la Solidarité Africaine'.

The overall impression was that Touré wanted more dynamism in his cabinet ("un gouvernement de terrain"). A more precise motive is difficult to pinpoint, though the old prime minister seemed to be ailing and had asked to be released. On the other hand, consensus politics in Mali, which had given Touré's government a long political honeymoon, seemed to be ending and some political parties started flexing their muscles for the 2007 elections. Positions crystallised and some protests began. Moreover, the non-partisan political movement that brought ATT to power was considering turning into a formal political party, but a sizeable number of politicians preferred to keep it a ground-swell movement. Indeed, in the past some of the parties had emerged in this way: Adema, for example, was originally a mass movement to remove Moussa Traoré in the early 1990s. Gradually, many of the 2002 election promises were seen to be failing and some changes were expected. However, throughout 2004 the political opposition was mute and even the trade unions decided not to take overt action, despite arrears in payments and lack of job opportunities. Union leaders declared that Mali was best served by unity in government and a high level of trust in the president.

Whatever the reasons for the cabinet reshuffle, if there were internal divisions within the cabinet, they remained hidden: the consensus culture of Mali's governance precluded publicity leaks. This was in keeping with the way ATT has continued Mali's policy since the advent of electoral democracy, in order to have stability and calm in the country. He also demands flexibility and modesty from leading officials. One major issue was the start of a major campaign against corruption, for which a 'Cellule d'Appui aux Structures de Contrôle de l'Administration' (CASCA) was inaugurated with the aim of being effective in 2005, plus the appointment on 1 April of a general national accountant (Sid Sosso Diara). One stimulus was the scandal over the embezzlement of CFAfr 2.6 bn (€ 4 m) in the departments of economy and finance. However, despite government rhetoric, actions were few and very slow, and it is debatable whether the government will have either the power or the stamina to fight this internal battle.

Some hitches in peace and stability proved to be minor ripples in the political pond. A persistent issue has been unrest among students at Mali's secondary and tertiary education institutions in Bamako. On 15 and 16 May, a general strike by teachers hit the country, but

by the end of the year protests had become more focused. Irked by the commercialisation of education, non-payment of bursaries, infighting among faculty and inadequate educational facilities, and triggered by rivalries between students of different schools, students rose in a series of protests against school establishments, especially the faculty of economic and juridical sciences. On 30 November, this resulted in the death of one student (Mamadou Traoré, or 'Papou') that shook the country. His death was still under investigation at the end of the year, when nine students, three policemen and a government official were detained for questioning. The matter was aggravated by the later deaths of a girl and a boy. Though largely unrelated to the protest marches, they made for a nationwide scandal. Problems in education will probably remain on the political agenda in the next years of ATT's mandate, especially at the recently created, severely understaffed and under-equipped University of Bamako. Compared to the educational unrest, other protests had little effect. Protests by butchers (24 April) and journalists (28 August) proceeded more smoothly, as did one by Malian artists against illegal copying of their work (21 June). The freeing of the hostages from Qatar who had been in the hands of northern rebels was a boost for the government.

In February, the new election committee was appointed and installed and on 30 May elections were held in all 703 communes in Mali for the second time, and went quietly and well, with a record 43% voter turnout (5.6 m Malians voted). The winner was the former ruling party, Adema, with 28%, URD ('Union Rassemblement Democratique') trailing with 14% and RPM with 13%. Some alliances of smaller parties followed with 11% and a coalition of individuals with 9%. Other parties, historically important in the democratisation process, like the CNID ('Congrès National d'Initiative Democratique') and BDIA ('Bloc pour la Democratie et l'Integration Africaine') fared less well. Observers were satisfied with the proceedings and generally concluded that democratisation processes in Mali were well under way. However, problems remained, such as the weak administration of justice and widespread and deeply rooted corruption.

The problems in the north of Mali have abated but seemed not to have been resolved, though the banditry in the empty north seemed to have no political overtones any longer. One incident occurred on 2 July, when a Malian Red Cross mission in the north was attacked and robbed of their vehicle by bandits. A more serious clash was between Arab and Kounta in eastern Mali, near Gao, resulting in 13 people being killed in September. Both groups have longstanding historical links to the area, having lived relatively peacefully under Kounta chieftaincy for centuries. However, decentralisation measures generated competition over access to the few resources of the region, both ecological – mainly waterholes – and political, namely control of the few trans-Saharan roads. In 2002 and 2003, there had already been clashes, but not on this scale. This clash seemed related to the Islamic fundamentalist group that kidnapped a party of European tourists in south Algeria in 2003, released them in August, and then sought refuge in the mountains of eastern Mali. As a consequence, the US sent military instructors to train the Malian army in anti-terrorist warfare techniques in Gao, providing them with all-terrain vehicles and desert warfare equipment,

as part of the Pan-Sahel Initiative, now known as Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI). This issue was, of course, most vividly publicised when two stages of the Paris-Dakar rally, held from 1–16 January, were cancelled because of gang activity in northern Mali. French intelligence uncovered – and foiled – an Islamic militant plot to kidnap rally competitors.

Foreign Affairs

The largest external political problem for Mali was the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. Since over a million Malians lived in Côte d'Ivoire, the ongoing conflict heavily impacted the Malian economy. At the end of March, the Ivorian army killed several civilians in the rebel-held north, which resulted in another wave of Malians living in that area returning to Mali. With them came an unspecified number of Ivorian 'rebels', who agreed, however, not to use Mali as a rallying point for the armed struggle. Several high-level conferences were held during 2004 (27 July in Bamako, 26 November in Ouagadougou and 15 December in Abuja) to address the issue. There were other international contacts, e.g., on 15–16 May at a conference in Bamako with the other countries in West Africa plus the Maghrib countries united under the CEN-SAD (Community of Sahel-Saharan States), namely Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, Gambia and Mauritania as well as Egypt, to address joint problems in the area, such as civil war, drought, AIDS, the world market for cotton and unemployment. On 26 and 27 April the countries bordering the Niger River conferred in Paris on the management of this crucial waterway and the development of inland fisheries on the river, just as they had done on the problems of cotton production and marketing on 19 February in Bamako.

Most external political efforts were directed at generating aid funds in various ways. Loans were obtained from the World Bank, the Islamic Bank, and the Bank of West Africa and the Sahel-Sudan Bank for various purposes, such as road construction, HIV/AIDS campaigns, security and water management. Deals with, among others, China, the US, the Netherlands, Belgium and Kuwait secured additional funds, plus the cancellation of some Mali debts (by China), and in the latter part of the year funds from various sources were secured to combat the locust plague.

Mali was visited by several foreign dignitaries, mostly from the sub-region, such as the representatives of the Francophone states (22 February); the president of Gambia (21–23 March); the premier of Morocco (11–12 April); the finance ministers of Kuwait (28 June) and of Canada (19 August); a Chinese delegation (15–17 November); and the premier of Haiti (28 November). President Touré himself was quite active in visiting other countries: Egypt (26–28 January); Libya (26–28 February and 18–21 August); Ghana (19–20 March); Guinea (20–21 May); Mozambique (23–24 May); Burkina Faso (21–22 June, 8–9 September, 26–27 November); China (15–19 July); Gambia (22–23 July); Libya (18–28 August); and Niger (11–12 October). On the international scene the former president

Konaré generated visibility for Mali as president of the AU; in October, he published an autobiography entitled "Alpha Oumar Konaré, an African from Mali."

Socioeconomic Developments

Just as in 1998, Mali was plagued by locusts in 2004. The previous two years had seen a moderate invasion of locusts, with a recrudescence in some places, especially the wetter spots in north and central Mali, the Mopti region. New swarms bred during the early months of 2004, on the border with Mauritania and Niger as well, and further east into Chad. The FAO at the start of 2004 tried mainly to preclude a locust migration from the northern Sahel into the northwest, to prevent further breeding in the Maghrib. However, this had limited success. Despite massive activity in the north (6 million hectares treated with insecticides), early spring saw several swarms mature and migrate towards Mali, where the wet season produced further swarms.

Estimates of **crop loss** ranged from one-third to (more probably) one-fifth of the national harvest (750,000 tonnes out of the expected roughly three million tonnes). However, later reports noted that the loss of the projected harvest was at least partly due to failing rains at the end of the season. President Touré, who toured the afflicted areas (the regions of Timbuktu, Mopti and Kayes in particular) assured the stricken population that famine was not expected and that all food would be shared ("as long as Sikasso has only one tuber of manioc, Mali will share it"). The reason for this assurance was that the main food producing area, the 'rice granary' of the Niger basin and the inner delta, were largely spared through joint international efforts, even though the southern part of the delta was affected. Algeria in particular, both through direct involvement and by leading the other Maghrib countries, spearheaded actual help in money, equipment and insecticides. More international aid followed from the EU and the US. The efficacy of **locust extermination** was, however, hampered by lack of equipment on the ground, outdated chemicals, lack of spraying aeroplanes and insufficient knowledge about locust extermination among both cadres and the local population. Also, the long-term risk of the chemicals for the environment and the immediate risk of the reuse of empty chemical vats by locals called for a sustained campaign. An early warning system was also re-established.

At year's end, the Asian tsunami diverted international attention from the locust plague, but also produced a wave of solidarity in the country, uniting expatriate Malians (estimated at 25% of the population) in helping their kin. Other countries were affected as well, such as Mauritania, but Mali produces 80% of what it consumes while Mauritania relies much more on imported food. Food distribution began to get under way in November 2004. At least 10% of all villages were severely afflicted and needed aid, and **distribution** was monopolised by the presidential office, which distributed the free food handouts. This was interpreted by some as a way to boost the president's standing among the grassroots and to

position himself for the new elections, but it also reflected genuine concern in the central office (in August the president handed over one month's salary to the anti-locust campaign and urged his ministers to do the same) and did not seem to have harmed the efficiency of the distributions. If some areas remained outside the distribution programmes, as seemed the case, this was not different from earlier distributions.

A perennial ecological problem manifested itself earlier than usual, due to the locust plague. The hard hit north sent its cattle south sooner than usual. The usual arrangement is that cattle return south when the rice and millet harvest is well under way, with the major crossing of the Niger by the herds usually well orchestrated. In 2004, the transhumance areas were depleted well before that date, and the herds had to search for food south of the Niger before the harvest. This resulted in tensions with resident farmers, which in some places erupted into open conflict, though without casualties. The usual exodus of seasonal labour from the stricken areas also started earlier this year and more young people moved to the cities in search of gainful employment. There, they were thwarted by the loss of the Ivorian labour market, and more young farmers from the Niger bend moved into Bamako, south Mali and the cities of Ghana.

Despite the major attention on the locust plague, drought also remained on the political agenda. In August, government imposed a general ban on tree felling throughout Mali, and announced some initiatives for tree planting. The 10% of tree cover is under pressure from commercial logging and charcoal production. Given the status of the water and forests department, however, it is debatable whether this measure will have the effect intended. The department is seen by the majority of the rural population as a police force that penalises locals for any use of wood. Thus, the law on rural sales of wood, issued at the start of 2004, which aims at a more balanced use of fuel and construction wood and tries to regulate commercial wood extraction, probably will not have the effect intended. At the very beginning of the year, in January, the government promised to install 9,600 new village pumps during the next decade.

Mali in 2004 continued to suffer from its usual socioeconomic problems, but some improvement was discernible. Illiteracy declined slowly, to 71% (73% in 2002, 77% in 1997 and 81% in 1990). School enrolment rose to 61% in 2000 (41% in 1995, 25% in 1985). The national debt showed some reduction – \$ 2,803 m in 2002 against \$ 2,903 m in 1993 – though in 2002, 73% of the population still had less than \$ 1 per day in income.

There were severe health-related problems. Average life expectancy declined from 45 years (1990) to 41 years in 2002. Infant mortality stands at 152 per 1,000, child mortality at 231 per 1,000, and maternal mortality at 630 per 100,000. The rising HIV infection rate – still severely underreported in 2001 at 1.7% – the rising incidence of malaria (still the largest killer in Mali) and an outbreak of cholera underscored the health vulnerability of the Malian population. Mali participated in a Chinese project to field-test their new Amonquinoline anti-malaria drug, and the results seemed promising. World demand for this new drug rose exponentially in 2004 and the Chinese will probably not be able to keep up

with demand. Furthermore, the drug is still quite expensive for Mali. Cholera resulted in over 100 deaths at the end of 2003 and broke out again in the western part of the country in February and March 2004. In May, the region of Tla, 350 kilometres north of Bamako, reported 21 cholera victims. After the onset of the rainy season, no new cases were reported, but it is unlikely that the epidemic was fully over. Mali participated in a general West African vaccination campaign against poliomyelitis, which started at 8 October.

The government initiated a campaign against female **circumcision**, still a reality for the overwhelming majority of Malian women. In announcing the campaign, the government stressed that the practice was not Islamic: it argued that the custom was strongest where Islam was weakest. However, the incidence (91%) that seems to hold for most parts of Mali. Of course, as has been stressed extensively in Islamic discourse, the observation that circumcision is not Quranic is correct. Indeed, the campaign would appear to be a soft sell to spare the evident sensibilities on the issue. It seemed more a donor issue than an internal Malian problem and the upcoming elections will probably force the government to soft-pedal this issue. Yet Mali did aim to play a major role in African Islam, and held a large conference on Sufism in Bamako (17–22 December).

Tourism was on the rise in 2004, as it was during the last decades. In the previous two decades, at least according to government statistics, the number of tourists rose from 35,000 to 150,000 per year. The government, together with several private partners, stimulated a widening of the tourist appeal. Though the Dogon country remained the main attraction, the implications of this tourist situation were increasingly realised. Government, the travel industry and travel agents, both international and Malian, became concerned about the impact of tourism on the Dogon area, realising that authenticity and mass tourism are not compatible. Measures to broaden the attraction of Mali tourism were discussed. The region of Timbuktu was singled out as a tourist development area; both the visits by the Aga Khan and Chirac at the end of 2003 and the new airports in Mopti (developed for the 'Coupe Afrique des Nations', the continental football championship) and Timbuktu were a stimulus. The latter airport featured as a projected direct air link between the US and Timbuktu, which authorities thought would not only increase tourism to that desert city, but also to the rest of Mali. The American fascination with Timbuktu has a long history, just as the city is the symbol for the ultimate foreign experience, but in this case a military interest was assumed by many commentators. The struggle against international terrorism has brought the Sahara region into focus as a zone of terrorist recruitment, and, as mentioned above, American military advisers assist Malian regular troops in desert tactics and anti-terrorist campaigns.

Malian tourism received additional international recognition in 2004. UNESCO put various buildings of Malian culture on the World Cultural Heritage list, such as the Askia tomb in Gao (15th century), and several objects in **Timbuktu**, for example, the mosques of Djingarey-Ber, Sidi Yéhya and Sankoré. These, together with the famous tourist destinations of Djenné and the Dogon country, which were put on this list in 1986, means that Mali

is high on the world cultural agenda. The specific singling out of Timbuktu and Gao might help to develop a tourist infrastructure in the desert fringes. Also, Timbuktu saw a large store of manuscripts unearthed in August, a major find in the study of the history of Mali. The intellectuals of Mali, together with the diaspora Malians, united in their efforts to promote the safekeeping of their cultural heritage. The government restored the mosque of Shehu Amadou at Hamdallaye, the now deserted capital of the former Macina emirate, and inaugurated the building, which had to be rebuilt from scratch, on 11 June 2004.

Malian culture was exported in 2004 as well: several troupes of musicians, mask dancers, **griots** and artisans toured Europe and America. However, the high point of Mali's culture was the qualification of its football team for the Olympic games in Athens, and the fact that the team made it all the way to the quarter finals, where it was eliminated by Italy.

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