

# Malian rivals sign peace deal

## Bamako and Tuareg-led rebel alliance sign a landmark peace deal to end years of fighting in the country's north.

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An alliance of Tuareg-led rebels and the Malian government signed a peace deal on Saturday which is meant to draw a line under a 2012 uprising.

The Algerian-brokered deal, signed by a representative of the rebel Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) in the Malian capital Bamako, hands greater autonomy to the sparsely populated northern region of Mali in a bid to put an end to a cycle of four uprisings since independence from France in 1960.

The Algiers Accord aims to bring stability to the country's vast northern desert, cradle of several Tuareg uprisings since the 1960s and a sanctuary for armed fighters linked to al-Qaeda.

The document had already been signed in May by the government and loyalist fighters, but the CMA, a coalition of rebel groups, had been holding out until amendments were agreed to two weeks ago.

The rebels [finally agreed](#) to commit on June 5 after winning a stipulation that its fighters be included in a security force for the north, and that residents of the region be represented better in government institutions, among other concessions.

Sidi Brahim Ould Sidati, a member of the Arab Movement of Azawad, put his name to the document in a televised ceremony in the capital Bamako on behalf of the CMA.

Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders, former head of the UN peacekeeping force in Mali, and his French counterpart Laurent Fabius welcomed the CMA's commitment to the accord and urged Mali to ensure the deal was implemented.

"This responsibility lies primarily with the Malian actors and the government and armed groups must regain mutual trust - the only possibility for progress," they said in a joint op-ed in French daily Le Monde published on Friday.

"The political party leaders also have an important role to play, as well as civil society, including women and youth. In a word, reconciliation is the business of all Malians," they added.

Ramtane Lamamra, the foreign minister of Algeria, which has been leading international efforts to mediate the peace talks, attended the ceremony, along with scores of rebels.

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The peace accord, hammered out over months under the auspices of the UN, calls for the creation of elected regional assemblies but stop short of autonomy or federalism for northern Mali.

"It is a necessary and highly anticipated step, it will help to clarify the situation on the ground. Violence has increased in recent months," said Bamako-based political commentator Souleymane Drabo.

"The situation is untenable for everyone - for the people, for the United Nations and government forces."

But Drabo, a columnist at the pro-government L'Essor daily, warned that the CMA's signature did not guarantee peace.

"In 1992, a national pact was signed here between the government and armed groups and ... fighting continued for three years after the signing," he said.

Mali was shaken by a [coup in 2012](#) that cleared the way for Tuareg separatists to seize towns and cities of the north.

Al-Qaeda-linked fighters then overpowered the Tuareg, taking control of northern Mali for nearly 10 months until they were ousted in a French-led military offensive.

The country remains deeply divided, with the Tuareg and Arab populations of the north accusing sub-Saharan ethnic groups in the more prosperous south of marginalising them.

Source: Agencies

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