

SECURITY ADVICE: Burkina Faso 28 August 2017



SUMMARY

- Sources indicate that a group of known terrorists are moving southwards through Burkina Faso in the Gayeri-Yamba area, 186 miles east of Ouagadougou.
- It is believed that the group seeks to punish villages who do not submit recruits, and to kidnap foreign expatriates in the area, especially from mines, over the Tabaski festival period.
- Expatriates are warned to leave the area or keep a low profile during Tabaski (1-3 September).

SECURITY ADVISORY

Information indicates that a group of known terrorists are moving southwards through Burkina Faso in the Gayeri-Yamba area, 186 miles east of Ouagadougou. The group is heading toward Fada Ngourma, but could split or detour toward the capital. It is believed that their intentions are two-fold. First, the group may be seeking to punish villages who do not submit recruits to their cause. Second, the group may attempt to kidnap foreign expatriates in the area, especially from mines over the Tabaski festival period. Expatriates should keep a low profile, or leave the area profile during Tabaski (1-3 September).

The risk for terrorism in Burkina Faso is very high. Methods of attack in Burkina Faso have included complex attacks by militants, small arms fire and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as well as kidnapping. Along the nation's northern border with Mali, there has been a sharp rise in terrorist activity. Militants in this region have targeted the local communities, launching attacks and threatening schools.

The nation contributes to the UN peacekeeping initiative in Mali, however over the past year, the conflict in Mali has spilled over into Burkina Faso. Militant groups operating in West Africa have targeted hotels, cafes and restaurants visited by foreigners. On 13 August, suspected Islamist militants killed at least 18 people, including eight foreigners, and wounded several others during a raid on the Istanbul restaurant in Ouagadougou. Security sources believed the attackers came from Mali, or close to the border. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, however it bears resemblance to a AQIM attack in 2016 on the Cappuccino Cafe in the same district, that left 29 dead. In January 2016, AQIM also claimed responsibility for an attack at Splendid hotel in Ouagadougou, killing 22. The nation is considered a legitimate target by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and their affiliates.

Earlier in 2017, extremist groups announced a merger under the name Jama'at Nasr al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM), also known as Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM). In June, the group claimed responsibility for an attack that killed five at a luxury resort located just outside the Malian capital, Bamako. JNIM is known to operate in the Mali/Burkina Faso border region.

MS Risk has recorded a growth in JNIM's size and confidence, coupled with an increase in financing and brazenness. These factors could lead to the group to attempt to push further south into Burkina Faso. Within the last two months, the group has received ransom payments in exchange for the release of two long-held captives. The ransom payments have likely motivated them to search for new victims. The group has become increasingly aggressive and have gained the confidence to launch attacks where they not expected. Kidnapping may also be outsourced to local criminal gangs. All expats must be alert to risk of kidnap or attack during this period. There have been increased instances of attacks in neighbouring countries; this activity in Burkina Faso's remote eastern region has been anticipated. Burkinabe state security forces are aware of the hazard, expect heavy presence of troops or gendarmerie.

GUIDANCE

MS Risk advises against all travel to the following parts of Burkina Faso: all areas of the country north of the town of Boulsa; areas within 40 km (24 miles) of the western border with Mali; the W National Park in the southeast bordering Niger and Benin. MS Risk advises against all but essential travel to the remainder of the country, including the capital Ouagadougou.

In eastern Burkina Faso, MS Risk advises expats to keep a low profile or evacuate over the Tabaski festival period from 1-3 September. Avoid travel between towns by road at night, and if possible, travel in convoy. Seek advice from local authorities before departure. **Kidnapping may also be outsourced to local criminal gangs; all expats must be alert to risk of kidnap or attack during this period.** Remain vigilant: avoid large gatherings of people, and follow the instructions of the security authorities. MS Risk is currently monitoring the situation. We have consultants operating in the country and maintaining a crisis response capability if needed.