

Mali suicide blast: Al-Qaeda affiliate claims attack, death toll rises to 60

19/01/2017 16:52 by admin

Mali: Al-Qaeda's North African affiliate said that al-Mourabitoun, a group linked to it, carried out the suicide attack that killed more than 50 people in northern Mali.

The attack targeted soldiers and members of rival armed groups

A suicide bomber in an explosives-laden vehicle penetrated a camp in northern Mali, killing at least 60 people and wounding 115 soldiers.

The attack marked a significant setback for peace efforts. Suspicion quickly fell on the Islamic extremist groups operating in the area which oppose the 2015 peace agreement that brought the parties together.

The morning blast on yesterday hit the Joint Operational Mechanism base in the city of Gao, home to Malian soldiers and hundreds of former fighters who signed the peace agreement with the government.

Witnesses said the car breached the camp as hundreds of fighters were gathering for a meeting. The office of Mali's President put the provisional death toll at 60, with 115 wounded.

Dr Sadou Maiga at Gao's hospital told The Associated Press that all other hospital activities had ceased with dozens of wounded victims arriving.

"Some have died from their wounds, and others are in a very grave state. At this point, it's not the toll of dead and injured that interests me, it's saving who I can," he said.

The attack underscores the enormous challenges that remain in northern Mali four years after the French military led an intervention to drive the jihadists from power in the major towns across the north. The peace agreement has proved difficult to implement.

The former fighters who signed the 2015 peace deal include ethnic Tuareg secular rebels who once fought the Malian military. Now they are supposed to be forming joint patrols in the area, though the program has yet to begin.

"If the security situation continues to deteriorate, then soon there won't be any peace to keep in Mali," UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous told the UN Security Council yesterday.

He said attacks are becoming more sophisticated, and that rivalry among armed groups continues to slow implementation of the peace deal.

Ladsous reminded the council that it has the power to impose "targeted measures" against those who violate the cease-fire.

At the United Nations, Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop said the "criminal, cowardly, barbaric attack" will not deter the government from moving forward to promote peace.

Mali has become the world's deadliest UN peacekeeping mission. Some 29 UN peacekeepers were killed last year in attacks blamed on jihadist armed groups, according to a Human Rights Watch report released yesterday.

- With AP Inputs