

Beat: Miscellaneous

Suicide bomber kills 2 UN peacekeepers at bank in Mali

-, 15.12.2013, 01:48 Time

USPA News - Two United Nations (UN) peacekeepers were killed Saturday and others were injured when a suicide bomber drove his explosives-laden car into a bank they were guarding in northern Mali, coming just a day before the country is set to hold a second round of voting in parliamentary elections. The attack happened at around 6:45 a.m. local time on Saturday when the explosives-laden vehicle crashed into the Malian Solidarity Bank in the northern town of Kidal, causing a large explosion that caused the building to collapse and blew out the windows of surrounding buildings.

The bank was being guarded by peacekeepers of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in partnership with Malian security forces. The mission confirmed that two Senegalese peacekeepers were killed while seven peacekeepers and four Malian service members were injured. "All the injured were immediately treated at the scene by medical personnel and the most seriously injured were evacuated to Gao with the assistance of the security forces. The number of casualties remains preliminary," MINUSMA said in a press statement. There were no civilian casualties as the bank was closed at the time of the attack. It was not immediately known who was behind Saturday's bombing, which sent thick clouds of black smoke rising above the town. It comes just a day before Malians will return to the polls in a second round of voting in parliamentary elections, following a first round on November 24 that was marked by a low turnout of just 38.4 percent and resulted in no party winning an absolute majority. "We cannot accept these kinds of barbaric acts. I offer my sincere condolences to the President of Senegal and the bereaved families," said MINUSMA head Bert Koenders. "Those responsible for this attack must be identified and brought to justice to answer for their actions. This attack will in no way affect our determination and commitment to continue our mission to secure peace and security in Mali." The UN Security Council, which is composed of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members, strongly condemned Saturday's attack. "The members of the Security Council stressed that those responsible for this attack shall be held accountable, and called on the Government of Mali to swiftly investigate the attack and bring the perpetrators to justice," the Council said in a press statement. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon added that the UN remains undeterred in its mission to help achieve lasting peace in Mali. "The Secretary-General encourages all Malians to reject violence and support the peace process, including through their participation in Sunday's second round of legislative elections," Ban's spokesman said. The northern town of Kidal was also the scene of an attack in early November when two French journalists were kidnapped after interviewing a local leader of the Tuareg separatist movement and later killed. The victims were identified as Radio France Internationale (RFI) correspondents Ghislaine Dupont and Claude Verlon. In July, MINUSMA took over from French and African forces which have battled al-Qaeda-linked fighters in the country's north. The mission is intended to help Malian authorities implement a transitional roadmap towards the full restoration of constitutional order, democratic governance and national unity. Fighting in northern Mali began in January 2012 as insurgent groups have been campaigning for independence and autonomy in the region. President Amadou Toumani Toure was ousted in a coup d'état in March 2012 for failing to handle the crisis, and by April, much of the region had been completely seized by rebel forces. Responding to requests from the Malian government, the French government decided in January of this year to deploy armed forces in Mali in an effort to prevent rebels from advancing south and reaching the country's capital. French and African forces eventually captured key cities and towns from militants and have handed over security responsibilities to MINUSMA.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1645/suicide-bomber-kills-2-un-peacekeepers-at-bank-in-mali.html>

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