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**New Report Focuses on Needs, Expectations, and Fears of Mali's Civilians as
Peace Agreement is Implemented**

Washington, DC, August 4, 2015 — The Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) today released a new report, *Fending for Ourselves: The Civilian Impact of Mali's Three-Year Conflict*, which shows the prominence of civilian harm during the conflict and the concern, even following the peace accord signed in June, that underlying drivers of conflict remain unresolved. All parties who have been involved in fighting or peacekeeping, including the UN and French forces in Mali, need to adopt robust policies, practices, and tools to increase civilian protection measures and to mitigate harm from ongoing operations.

The report, based on more than 150 interviews, shows that many Malian civilians remain concerned about their safety, the likelihood of continued attacks by groups that oppose government rule in the North, and the way that the peace accord will be implemented. Civilians frequently highlighted the need for the Malian government and armed forces to focus, in an inclusive and equitable way, on restoring state authority and improving security and protection across the North.

“Despite three years of conflict and feeling abandoned by the State, civilians across northern Mali have overwhelmingly rejected violence, including violent extremism, but call on security actors to uphold the principle of ‘do no harm’ in their operations and to make greater efforts to protect vulnerable communities,” said Kyle Dietrich, Senior Program Manager on Africa and Peacekeeping at CIVIC. “The Malian armed forces, UN peacekeeping force, and French Barkhane forces should redouble their commitment and capacity to protect civilians proactively and make amends for harm caused to civilians by the last three years of conflict.”

Between September 2014 and March 2015, CIVIC conducted extensive original research across Mali, interviewing civilians affected by the conflict, members of armed groups, government officials, civil society representatives, humanitarian workers, and officials from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (known by the French acronym MINUSMA). The report shows the urgent need for all parties to the conflict to make significant strategic and operational adjustments to their operations to mitigate harm to civilians and increase proactive protection measures.

In addition to reducing the likelihood of abuses, engaging all Malian communities in an inclusive way would contribute significantly to the Malian army's ability to defeat extremist groups that remain active in the country. A physician in Gao region told CIVIC: "The distrust between the civilian population and the security forces is at the heart of what undermines collaboration in the fight against terrorist groups in the region."

In addition to ensuring an inclusive Truth and Reconciliation process, CIVIC's research found that civilians want accountability for past impunity by all sides and the creation of new mechanisms to prevent, track, and address harm caused by security actors, including French and UN forces. Civilians also condemned the forcible retaking of key northern towns and the use of proxy forces and militias to provide security.

Since January 2012, hundreds of Malians have been killed, and hundreds of thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their homes. Following the collapse of state control over the northern half of the country in early 2012, the country suffered three years of conflict, primarily in the North, between the government and armed groups. With the absence of state authority, secular separatist groups and Islamist extremist groups battled for influence and dominance in Kidal, Timbuktu, and Gao regions.

A French-led military intervention in early 2013, known now as Operation Barkhane, quickly reclaimed key northern towns from armed groups. However, ongoing violence and instability, fueled largely by extremist organizations, continue to threaten civilian populations. Civilian perspectives on the causes and consequences of the conflict have been relatively undocumented.

A 40-year-old Malian community leader in Timbuktu summed up what many civilians told CIVIC researchers: "Until state authority is fully restored, and there is a shared commitment by all communities, mistrust between security authorities and Arab and Tuareg ethnic groups will persist. Mistrust is a key component of the conflict, of the increasingly frequent attacks, and of the existence of Islamist cells in nomadic areas."

The report, which contains detailed recommendations regarding actions that should be taken by all parties to the conflict, is available in English at <http://civiliansinconflict.org/resources/pub/fending-for-ourselves-the-civilian-impact-of-malis-three-year-conflict> and French at <http://civiliansinconflict.org/resources/pub/laissee-pour-compte>.

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