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Wagner Tortured Civilians at Former UN Bases in Mali, Report Says

By AFP

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@razgruzka_vagnera

The Russian paramilitary group Wagner kidnapped, detained and tortured hundreds of civilians during its more than three years in Mali, including at former UN bases and military camps shared with the Malian army, according to a report published Thursday by a consortium of journalists.

The victims, interviewed from a refugee camp in neighboring Mauritania, described being waterboarded, beaten with electrical cables and burned with cigarette butts, according to the investigation led by Forbidden Stories and conducted in partnership with France 24, Le Monde and IStories.

The investigation identified six sites where civilians were illegally detained and tortured between 2022 and 2024, though the actual number is likely higher, the journalists said. The methods mirrored those reportedly used by Wagner in Ukraine and Russia, and in some cases,

resulted in deaths.

Mali's ruling junta, which came to power in coups in 2020 and 2021, cut ties with former colonial power France and turned to Russia for political and military support. While the junta has never officially acknowledged Wagner's presence, claiming instead to work with Russian "instructors," human rights groups and Western governments have long alleged Wagner fighters were active in the country.

Last week, a Telegram channel affiliated with Wagner said the group would be withdrawing from Mali. Its fighters are expected to be absorbed into the Africa Corps, a Kremlin-linked paramilitary force, according to diplomatic and security sources who spoke to AFP.

A UN investigation accused Malian troops and foreign fighters of executing at least 500 people during an anti-jihadist operation in the town of Moura in 2022 — a claim the junta denies. Western governments say Wagner mercenaries were involved.

In April 2024, bodies were discovered near a Malian military base days after the army and Wagner personnel reportedly detained dozens of civilians, most of them from the Fulani ethnic group.

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