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Civil Groups Sue Mali Over Wagner Abuses

By AFP

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Wagner Group mercenaries in Africa. **Grey Zone**

Three civil society groups filed a lawsuit before the African Union's human rights court on Monday, alleging that Mali's military and the Russian private military company Wagner committed "serious human rights violations" against civilians.

The groups, TRIAL International, the Pan African Lawyers Union and the International Federation for Human Rights, say it is the first known legal case brought before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights seeking to hold a state responsible for hiring and hosting private military contractors.

Wagner had a widespread presence in Africa, deploying fighters alongside the armies of countries including Libya and Mali, and also conducted vast disinformation and destabilization campaigns. It was replaced by the Africa Corps last year.

The suit focuses on atrocities allegedly committed in 2022. The civil society groups filing the claim hope to establish Mali's responsibility for failing to protect its citizens and for its refusal to prosecute those responsible for the abuses.

Related article: Why Wagner's Operations in Africa May Be Far From Over, Despite Mali Setback

After a 2021 pivot away from former colonial power France, Mali's military junta turned to Russia's notorious Wagner Group to combat a growing jihadist insurgency.

While Wagner helped the Malian army in recapturing key northern strongholds in 2023, the partnership has been marred by widespread reports of extrajudicial killings and torture.

In one such instance in April 2022, at least 50 civilians were killed and hundreds of others were arrested in central Mali after a "Russian advisor" operating alongside Malian soldiers was killed by a roadside bomb.

UN rights investigators say Malian troops and foreign forces presumed to be Wagner were also behind the massacre of at least 500 people in the central Malian town of Moura in March 2022.

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