



Genocide Watch  
The Alliance Against Genocide

## Genocide Emergency: Burkina Faso August 2020

Since 2016, three armed Islamist groups, the Group for Support of Muslims (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and Ansarul Islam, have reigned terror upon civilians in Burkina Faso. The violent insurgency has destabilized the country and produced one of the most alarming [humanitarian crises](#) on the continent. Since the insurgency began, civilian deaths have risen astronomically, up [more than 650%](#). In the past 18 months alone, militants have killed more than [2,000 civilians](#), forced the internal displacement of [920,000 people](#), and necessitated humanitarian assistance for more than [two million Burkinabés](#).

After Islamist rebels seized power in northern Mali in 2012, a controversial French-led military intervention dispersed the jihadists. The Islamist militants then moved from their stronghold in the [north to the south](#) bordering Burkina Faso. There, they regrouped and reorganized, forming the al-Qaeda affiliated JNIM and the Islamic State aligned ISGS.

Concurrently, an [indigenous Islamist movement](#) was taking root within Burkina Faso. In 2016, Ibrahim Malam Dicko, a radical cleric and supporter of the Malian jihadists, founded Ansarul Islam and exploited the [extreme poverty](#) and systemic government neglect in the Sahel region of northern Burkina Faso to radicalize and recruit local men. Dicko drew his support from [Fulani Muslims](#), who despite comprising a small minority in the country, make up a majority in the region. Many former adherents to Ansarul Islam subsequently joined JNIM and ISGS.

Since 2018, the jihadists have stepped up their attacks. Massacres against Christians and the targeting of churches have become increasingly common and began to spread beyond northern Burkina Faso. In December 2019 an attack on a Burkina Faso church [killed 14](#) Christian worshippers and in February 2020 another attack during Sunday Mass [left 24 dead](#).

A reactionary [cycle of violence](#) is taking place across Burkina Faso. Security forces and local self-defense militias are perpetuating this cycle in their attempts to eradicate the jihadist presence. In their increasingly fraught counterinsurgency efforts, government troops have killed hundreds of civilians, as evidenced by a recently unearthed [mass grave](#) containing 180 bodies. Where the government troops have been less active, vigilante self-protection forces, such as the [Koglweogo Militia](#), have also committed summary executions of hundreds of people, primarily Fulani, that they perceive to be affiliated with the Islamist groups.

Genocide Watch recognizes the violence in Burkina Faso as **Stage 9: Extermination**.

To prevent further bloodshed in Burkina Faso, Genocide Watch recommends:

- The United Nations deploy a peacekeeping force to Burkina Faso, similar to that of MINUSMA that is currently working to counteract these same groups in Mali.
- The government of Burkina Faso protect targeted civilians in the north of the country to help break the cycle of vigilantism.

- The government of Burkina Faso and civil society work together to prioritize education and development in the north to combat the roots of radicalization among the population there.
- NGOs and international governmental organizations increase humanitarian assistance to Burkina Faso to prevent the further escalation of an already dire humanitarian crisis and to provide options to individuals who may be tempted to otherwise join armed Islamist groups.