

Summary

Burkina Faso's military regime, led by former Captain Ibrahim Traore, is increasingly marked by its growing anti-French and anti-Western sentiments. The junta expelled three French diplomats on April 18 due to their meeting with civil society organisations. Western media organisations covering allegations of crimes against humanity perpetrated by Burkinabe soldiers have been suspended. Local civil society groups critical of the government are targeted by security forces, with recent reports emerging detailing the abduction and imprisonment of local civil society workers, civil servants, and lawyers.

Recent events and developments

Burkina Faso's military government has continued to remain hostile towards French presence and influence in the country. Additionally, freedom of expression and criticism of the government is clamped down on. On April 18, the junta ordered the expulsion of three French diplomats accused of "subversive activities". Their expulsion was reportedly due to their meeting with local civil society leaders. The junta's crackdown on freedom of expression and opposition to the government also affects locals in Ouagadougou. On February 20 and 21 respectively, security forces arrested and abducted two civil society group members and a civil servant for unknown reasons. The names of the individuals arrested had featured in a list of people "requisitioned to participate in the fight against terrorism", an initiative described as a forced conscription scheme targeting government critics. Burkinabe lawyer Guy Hervé Kam, who won a case against the scheme in December, was abducted from Ouagadougou airport on January 24 and jailed. On March 7, Ouagadougou's Administrative Court ordered his release, a decision which was appealed by the government. On April 23, the same court denied the government's appeal, upholding their March 7 verdict. However, Kam remains jailed as of this report's writing. The junta was additionally accused of summary executions on April 25 by Human Rights Watch, which accused Burkinabe military forces of executing 223 villagers, including 56 children, in Northern Burkina Faso on February 25. On April 26, Burkina Faso suspended BBC and Voice of America broadcasts for covering the allegations.

Impact assessment

Anti-French, and more recently, anti-Western sentiment is increasingly reflected in the Burkinabe junta's actions. The expulsion of French diplomats on April 18, the suspension of French, and on April 26, British and American media coverage are additional milestones in the junta's move away from Western influence, and towards closer cooperation with neighbouring juntas in Mali and Niger. This may cause a risk to Western organisations and their employees working in Ouagadougou, who may be perceived to be French or aligned with France even if from other states. Cooperation with civil society organisations with a history of government opposition could pose to employees the risk of surveillance, security checks, and potentially arrests by security forces. Furthermore, with widespread reporting on the alleged massacre of civilians on February 25, it is likely the junta will become further defensive, paranoid, and sceptical of Western presence in the country, even if not state affiliated. There is a further risk that developing anti-French and anti-Western sentiment amongst the population can manifest in protests in Ouagadougou against Western presence, as recently seen in Niger on April 13. Protests could potentially encourage mob violence and vigilante attacks against Western interests, such as against the premises of Western embassies. There is also a small risk of targeted harassment, or even crime, against Westerners working in the capital, though no such incidents have been reported yet. Any expression of opposition or criticism toward the government, especially online, pose to employees, and especially to local employees, the risk of investigation, arrest, and/or imprisonment by security forces.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff traveling to Burkina Faso to undertake a several days long HEAT training prior to travel.
- Monitor local news and liaise with local partners to remain updated on developing events.
- Advise staff to avoid expressing all personal opinions on the government and security situation.
- Cooperate with police and security forces.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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