

Make Sunday ‘an important celebration of democracy’ UN chief urges voters in Mali

On the eve of Mali’s crucial presidential election, the [United Nations Secretary-General](#) said that despite clear security challenges, voters in the arid African nation of around 18 million, needed to ensure that the key poll was first and foremost “an important celebration of democracy”.

The UN Stabilization Mission in the country, [MINUSMA](#), has been busy providing logistical support to the Government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, especially in the restive north and centre, where an alliance of militant Islamists and Tuareg rebels have been launching attacks with increasing frequency and ferocity against government troops and UN peacekeepers.

When the current President was elected in 2013, his administration replaced a transitional government which had wrested back control – with international support – of the outlying regions following a failed coup, that saw the iconic and ancient city of Timbuktu occupied by militants. Dozens of UN peacekeepers have made the ultimate sacrifice defending Mali’s fragile recovery in recent years.

In [a statement](#) issued by his Deputy Spokesperson on Saturday in New York, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), said that he was “closely following developments” this weekend.

Maintain the peaceful course, thereby ensuring that Sunday’s elections serve as an important celebration of democracy – *UN chief Guterres*

“On the eve of these polls, which are important for peace and reconciliation in Mali, the Secretary-General is encouraged by the overall peaceful climate that has characterized the electoral campaign to date, despite continued security challenges in the north and center of the country”, said the statement.

Mr. Guterres – who made [a landmark visit](#) to the country two months ago – called on “all Malians to maintain the peaceful course, thereby ensuring that Sunday’s elections serve as an important celebration of democracy.”

He urged all of the candidates and other political actors “to commit to making this poll a peaceful, free and transparent process, and to resolve any possible dispute through the appropriate institutions in accordance with the law.”

On Friday, the head of MINUSMA, Mahamat Saleh Annadif told the mission’s

Radio Mikado that although tensions are high and the threat of attacks persist, the result had to be respected if democratic rule was to be viewed as “irreversible”.

The mission has been providing transportation to candidates, training and support for officials involved in the democratic process, and distributed 200 tonnes of electoral material, mainly to remote areas where the political process is most vulnerable to abuse, and voters are most likely to feel intimidated going to the polls.

“The Secretary-General stresses that peace and reconciliation for all Malian citizens must prevail, irrespective of the electoral outcome” said the statement, reiterating the UN’s commitment overall, to keep supporting the electoral process in the weeks and months ahead.