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## **Mali Needs Canadian Peacekeepers**

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In the 2015 election campaign, Justin Trudeau promised Canadians and the world that, under his government, Canada would re-engage in UN peace operations, long neglected by the Conservatives. In power, he repeated his determination to keep his promise at his first meeting with the UN Secretary General in March 2016. A few months later, in August, he unveiled an ambitious plan to deploy up to 600 military personnel and 150 police in UN operations and to provide specialized equipment. The Department of Foreign Affairs also had an annual budget of \$150 million for the next three years to finance peace and security initiatives for fragile states, to protect women and girls, and to strengthen regional peace and security organizations

Although the Canadian plan was well received by the UN on paper, the government has been slow to implement it. However, in December 2016, Justin Trudeau received a full briefing on the various deployment options. The four options presented concerned missions in Africa: in Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since then, the Prime Minister has been unable to choose, and this attitude is unforgivable. In my opinion, Canada should participate in the UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, MINUSMA, for at least three reasons.

First, in Mali, Canada is on familiar ground and has deep roots. The two countries have had diplomatic relations since 1970, and Mali is one of the top beneficiaries of Canadian development assistance. Canadian diplomacy, supported by cooperants and NGOs, has spared no effort to support development and democracy and to promote the protection of human rights at all stages of this country's sometimes violent history. Canadian industrialists, especially in the mining sector, have also invested heavily there.

Second, Mali is in the heart of an area, the Sahel, where many crises and issues, such as weak government, proliferation of Islamist terrorist groups, trafficking of drugs, weapons and people, competition for natural resources, and migratory flows, threaten the security of all of West Africa, as well as Europe and consequently North America. Furthermore, since 2012, Mali has been going through a delicate political transition following a coup, a rebellion in the north of the country and repeated attacks by Islamist terrorist groups. This situation has led to the deployment of three military operations to stabilize not only the country but also the region: the Barkhane operation led by France, with the mandate of fighting terrorism in the Sahel; the UN mission, MINUSMA, whose priority tasks are to protect civilians, to accompany the peace and reconciliation process between Malians, and to restore the government's authority throughout the country; and finally the European Union's mission,

EUTM–Mali, with the mandate of training a national army.

The job of reconstruction and stabilization is immense. As UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on September 20, 2017, Mali is still fragile and in a sensitive period one year before the next presidential election. If the country is to take this step and implement the peace agreement, it needs all the resources at its disposal. In his latest report on the situation in Mali to the Security Council, the Secretary General called on member states to contribute to the mission. In particular, he requested some specialized equipment to fill some of MINUSMA's gaps, such as armored personnel carriers, helicopter units, an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance company, and a company to neutralize explosives and munitions. Canada has this equipment and could make it available to the mission.

Third and last, Canada, as a founding member of the UN, has the responsibility to ensure that peacekeeping operations run smoothly. Several European countries have returned to peacekeeping missions, especially in Mali, in order to strengthen them. Canada must share the burden of peace and security in Africa. It must help Mali and the UN.