

UN reports lack of jobs drives recruitment by armed groups in Africa

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Soldiers of the Malian Army Forces

Malian soldiers secure the pist between Goundam and Timbuktu, northern Mali, during Operation Barkhane, an 'anti-terrorist operation' in the Sahel [Philippe Desmazes/AFP Photo]

United Nations, February 7 (RHC)-- The lack of employment is what is driving people to join fast-growing armed groups in sub-Saharan Africa, more than religious belief, according to a report by the UN Development Program (UNDP) based on interviews with hundreds of former fighters.

While worldwide deaths from “terrorism” have declined in the last five years, deaths in sub-Saharan Africa have risen, making it the global epicentre of attacks, the UNDP report said, citing the Global Index annual survey.

Countries from East to West Africa have seen armed groups take over large swaths of territory, displacing millions, eroding faith in democratic government and causing widespread hunger. The Sahel region has been the most affected, as groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) expand their attacks in one of the world’s poorest regions.

The UNDP report found that 25 percent of voluntary recruits to such groups cited needing money as their primary reason for joining, while 22 percent cited wanting to join with family and friends and 17 percent cited religious ideas.

At the same time, nearly half of the respondents said there was a “tipping point” that pushed them to join, such as the killing or arrest of family members by state security forces.

The study was based on interviews with more than 2,000 individuals in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan, the UNDP said.

These included more than 1,000 former fighters interviewed in detention facilities, prisons and rehabilitation or community centres, the UNDP said. The other 1,000 individuals were a control group drawn from the same communities to enable a comparison between the responses given by the former recruits to those given by people of the same background.

Education levels among recruits were low, and mistrust in the government was high, the report said. An additional year of schooling reduced the likelihood of voluntary recruitment to armed groups by 13 percent, it found. “The social contract between states and citizens must be reinvigorated to tackle root causes of violent extremism,” said UNDP administrator Achim Steiner.

The report recommended greater investment in child welfare, education and quality livelihoods to counter and prevent “violent extremism,” rather than a militarised approach.

The Global Index is produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace think tank, which draws its data from the Tracker database of Dragonfly, a private-sector security and intelligence service.

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