



# **The Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA)**

*Political platform*

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## I. Preamble

In this platform, the Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) puts forward the reasons which compelled the Azawad people to resort to the use of force so that their voice *will be heard*. *They are convinced that only the independence of the Azawad will present an objective*, a realistic and a lasting solution which will bring an end to the conflict with the Malian state.

After presenting its historical, political, geographical, human, cultural and security arguments, the MNLA presents its vision in order to bring about a lasting political solution to the conflict.

\* The MNLA hopes to convince Mali to acknowledge that the independence of the Azawad represents a great opportunity for peace, development and peaceful co-existence which will benefit Mali in its endeavour to establish a modern state.

\* The movement hopes to convince the international community to understand and support the legitimate struggle of the Azawad people and to spare no effort so that justice will be rendered to the suffering Azawad people.

It urges the international community to spare no effort to put a stop to the blatant and malicious interference by some states, and to help in solving the conflict.

The MNLA also urges the international community to direct its efforts to eradicate the threats presented by Islamist terrorists and drug-traffickers not only against the Azawad but also against the whole Sahel region.

## II. Introduction

Since Mali's independence in 1960, the Azawad people - the Tuareg and Moors in particular - have been subjected to humiliation, harassment, massacres and genocides which only received timid disapproval by the international community. Being stigmatized and the unfortunate victims of illiteracy and injustice, the Azawad people had no choice but to revolt, leading to their mass exodus to neighbouring countries.

Constantly, the Malian media and the country's political statements abound in clichés and stereotypes when dealing with the issue of the Azawad population.

Any attempt by the Azawad people to air their grievances would provoke angry reactions by the Malian media, political parties and intellectuals to justify their marginalization. This would be followed by massacres and flagrant violations of their human rights perpetrated by the Malian state and its army.

While encouraging conflicts among the components of the Azawad population - setting Moors against Tuaregs, Tuaregs against Songhays or Fulas - the Malian authorities then categorize them into "good" and "bad" citizens. Such reoccurring discourse ended up in convincing ordinary Malians that the Azawad people can only be bad citizens.

Since the country's independence, everything has been done to persuade the Malians that they form two groups: Those of the south who dominate and to whom the state owes everything, and those of the north who must be assimilated, subdued or disappear.

This was how the Azawad people were forced in 1960 - against their will - to become Malians. Since then they have been treated by the state as second-class citizens and became the subject of extortion and massacres.

According to the French colonial administration sources, in 1960 the Tuareg population was estimated at 500,000 people. The 1998 census in Mali referred to less than 400,000 Tuaregs.

How can anyone explain scientifically such demographic decline of the Tuareg population despite the fact that Mali records one of the highest population growth in Africa? The country's population increased from 3,000,000 in 1960 to 15,000,000 in 2010.

After more than 50 years of the obvious failure of governance in Mali during which the Azawad people have been denied justice, the latter had no option other than claiming the universal right of legitimate defence, including taking up arms against the illegitimate state of Mali.

Opposition to a regime which flouts basic freedoms and threatens human life is one of the main principles of the international conventions since the 18th century. Accordingly, the Azawad people assert the right to refer to the provisions of Article 2 of the 26 August 1789 Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of Citizens, which was inspired by the 4 July 1776 Declaration of the American independence.

Of the four natural rights, the declaration included the right of "resistance to oppression". This was repeated in the 24 July 1793 Declaration of Human Rights and the Rights of Citizens. Its Article 33 states that "resistance to oppression is the consequence of other human rights".

Meanwhile, the provisions of Article 35 of the latter declaration state that "when a government violates the rights of people, rebellion is - for the people and for every faction of the people - the most sacred of rights and the most indispensable of duties". This can only legitimize the struggle of the Azawad people.

Given the nightmare they have been living for more than 50 years, the Azawad people have no option other than to recover their territory in its entirety and to decide their own destiny.

### **III. Azawad National Liberation Movement**

The Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA) is a political and military organization without tribal, ethnic, cultural or religious affiliation. Formed in November 2011, the movement was born out of the merger of the Azawad National Movement (MNA), founded on 1 November 2010 in Timbuktu, the Northern Mali Tuareg Alliance (ATNM) and a faction of the Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC) formed on 23 May 2006.

The former fighters of the earlier uprisings of 1963 and 1990 - including those of the diaspora and fighters who joined the Malian armed forces within the framework of the peace agreements of 1990 and 2006 - also joined the coalition which would found the present movement.

Embraced by various components of the Azawad people (Tuaregs, Songhays, Moors and Fulas), the MNLA was soon joined by intellectuals, tribal leaders and elected officials of the Azawad.

The MNLA continues the struggle pursued by the Azawad people since the end of the 1940s when our people realized that the colonial France had chosen to shape their destiny in the hands of the former colony of French Sudan, which became the Republic of Mali in 1960.

In 1957 and 1958, tribal leaders, notables and scholars of all the components of the Azawad people, sent messages to French President General de Gaulle to openly express their desire to proclaim their own independence away from future Mali.

As soon as it was formed, the MNLA opted for dialogue and a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Living up to its principles, the movement approached the Malian state and other players of the international community in order to propose solutions that would avoid war and to engage in negotiations to restore peace to the Azawad territory. However, all our calls for a political dialogue were rejected by the Malian regime.

### **IV. Our land the Azawad**

We will fight to liberate the whole of our territory to which the authorities in Mali refer by numbers of administrative regions (Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu) or simply "northern Mali".

The name Azawad (which means basin in the Tuareg dialect of Tamazight - Tamashagh) is an ancient name. The name was well known in the first sketches of maps of the central Sahara drawn by Arab and European explorers well before colonial penetration.

At the end of the 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Niger's Tuareg leaders politically established the name in their correspondence with General de Gaulle in order to demand the independence of their territory like other French colonies in Africa.

Since then, all Tuareg uprisings (1963, 1990, 2006, 2010), including that of 2012 led by the MNLA, have used the name Azawad. The 11 April 1992 peace agreement between the Unified Movements and Fronts of the Azawad (MFUA) and the Malian government established this name.

The Azawad territory covers an area of 932,490 square kilometres. Our country's geography, climate, economy and social and cultural life are different from those of Mali. It shares its eastern and northern borders with Algeria, northwestern borders with Mauritania, western borders with Mali and southern borders with Niger and Burkina Faso.

The population of Azawad is estimated at 3 million, of whom 50 per cent live in exile. As a result of repression, the Tuareg and Moor populations, which represent some 60 per cent of the population, were forced to leave the territory towards the neighbouring countries.

Their marginalization and lack of development forced hundreds of thousands of the Azawad people to leave their territory and immigrate to the country's south or to neighbouring countries.

The Tuareg and Moor components of the population seem to dominate the majority of the Azawad territory, while other ethnic groups are found mainly in urban centres.



The Tuaregs, Moors, Songhays and Fulas - who constitute the Azawad population - have historically lived in harmony. The shared cultural, historical, economic and social links among these four ethnic groups have for long profoundly cemented the sense of their belonging to the Azawad territory. Their shared attachment to the land and water had reinforced their will to live together well before the arrival of the first colonists.

Economically, stock breeding, rain water and river-based agriculture, but also trade, are the main economic activities of the Azawad, while the territory's subsoil is abound with important mines and energy resources. The subsoil oil layers of the Taoudni basin (north of Timbuktu) and Tamasna are among the most important in the Sahara.

## V. MNLA's objectives and political vision

Exercising the right to enjoy self-determination is the primary objective of the MNLA in order to allow the Azawad people to decide their own destiny, including their security. Even if we have every reason to resort to the use of force, the MNLA has always opted for dialogue and negotiations as a way to settle conflicts before resorting to the use of force.

Our political vision is resolutely focused on building a democratic and modern society. The rule of law, individual and collective freedoms, justice, respect of human rights, economic, social and cultural development as well as cooperation and peace with other peoples, represent, in fine, the mode of the political management of the model society for which we are struggling.

Our vision promises a better future for the Azawad population. It aims to bring to an end repression, marginalization, discrimination, contempt and the feeling of insecurity which they have been suffering under the successive regimes of Bamako since 1990.

In our political project, we have attached great importance to cooperation among peoples, to good neighbourliness among states and to a harmonious integration with free and democratic states for the sake of the development, security and peace in the sub-region as well as at the international level.

In order to strengthen the iron will of the Azawad people to emancipate, the MNLA adheres and is committed to respect all human rights conventions, particularly the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols.

The MNLA rejects all kinds of extremism and fundamentalism whether they are the acts of groups or states. Convinced that terrorist and drug-trafficking groups present a real threat to the Azawad, the sub-region and the rest of the world, the movement is firmly determined - within the framework of a global cooperation - to contribute to the eradication of this disease.

## VI. MNLA's legitimacy

The MNLA's legitimacy in engaging in the combat to liberate Azawad rests on the population's passionate support for the right to self-determination enshrined in the international law and human rights conventions.

During their general assembly meeting held on 10 October 2011 in Zakak, in the Kidal region, the components of the Azawad population solemnly expressed their firm commitment to decide their own destiny as the Azawad people.

The following are excerpts from the declaration of the general assembly held in Zakak:

*"No African people are being called into question. It is the anti-democratic states inherited from the outdated colonial regimes, their management which is stained by corruption, nepotism and the absence of an egalitarian vision which would serve the common good which are being called into question.*

*In response to the bankruptcy of the Malian regime and its failure to build a state based on fairness and equality, we are determined to decide our own future and to govern ourselves according to the democratic principles drawing inspiration from our values in order to live in harmony with all our neighbours so that:*



- *We no longer be forced to resort to prolonged on wars.*
- *Build a secure future for our people and enable them to live in peace on our land.*
- *No longer be subjected to genocide, and substitute for the endemic violence a legitimate authority which shows concern for the wellbeing of our people.*
- *Ensure that our people will no longer suffer humiliation and harassment in refugee camps.*
- *No longer conclude or enter into agreements with the regimes that not respect them.*
- *To guarantee the security and protect the properties of all the Azawad people.*
- *Guarantee for all the communities of the Azawad people their cultural, social and economic blossoming in conformity with the principle of human rights, particularly the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People.*
- *Draw up a social contact which fulfils the legitimate aspirations of the Azawad people.*

*For these reasons, we, the Azawad people, declare that there is no option other than that of managing our own affairs and we solemnly give a mandate to the MNLA to realize our aspirations to independence."*

## **VII. Gao meeting of Azawad intellectuals, leaders and notables**

During this meeting which was held on 25 and 26 April, the Azawad notables reiterated their demand to exercise their right to self-determination and urged the MNLA to continue to plead for the recognition of the independent Azawad state, which was declared unilaterally on 6 April 2012 following the total liberation of our territory.

The tribal leaders, once again, expressed their confidence in the MNLA and called on the international community to swiftly recognize the independence of the Azawad in order to bring to an end the suffering of the Azawad people. They also demanded terrorist groups and drug-traffickers to immediately leave the Azawad territory.

The leaders of the Azawad civil society movements (women, young people and NGOs) as well as refugee camps demanded that security be restored to the Azawad territory and urged the MNLA to find a lasting solution to the conflict.

MNLA's legitimacy in pursuing the struggle has been demonstrated on more than one occasion. During the 9 June 2012 ceremony of the nomination of the members of the Interim Council of the Azawad State (CTEA), several notables and intellectuals travelled to Gao to attend the ceremony.

The MNLA, which enjoys the firm support of the Azawad population, also relies on international human rights laws relating to the right of peoples to decide their own futures (The UN Charter, the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights (...)) and the right to self-determination (the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People).

More than 50 years of catastrophic and dramatic management of the Azawad (massacres, genocide, discrimination, exclusion, corruption and flagrant collusion with terrorists and drug-traffickers) have revealed the absurdity of all the moves to reunite the Azawad territory with the former French colony of Sudan, which became independent under the name of Mali in 1960.

Mali has proved its failure to manage our territory from Bamako and to understand the reality and the needs of our populations as well as our economic, cultural and social specificities.



## VIII. Our ambitions

After more than half a century of occupation, tragedies, injustice and the denial of their identity, the Azawad people aspire to live with dignity in their territory. The main ambition of our movement is to help our people to recover their full sovereignty, to be in charge of their territory's political, social and cultural life, security, economy, security and environment.

Our movement is convinced that its ambitions can only be realized by fighting for freedom, democracy, human rights, justice and good governance. We are firmly determined to build a democratic and modern society and guarantee the fundamental and individual freedoms for the common good of our people.

Our project of society aims to make the principle of equal opportunities the basic rule for all citizens of the Azawad irrespective of race, colour, religion, sex or ideology. These are all the things that the Malian state could not provide or guarantee during more than 50 years of the control of our territory.

Our movement accords total respect to the fundamental principle of human dignity and devotes full attention to the protection and promotion of human rights. The issues of human rights and fight against impunity constitute one of the priorities of our struggle. The MNLA reiterates its commitment to fight against impunity, including in its ranks, and to contribute with all available means in order to provide its help in this direction.

The separation of religion and state in order to guarantee religious freedom, will be a cornerstone of our political system. We are solemnly committed to guaranteeing the separation of powers, a balanced and transparent share of power at various levels of representation (local, regional and national).

The choice, the manner and the model of the functioning of our institutions will be based on the largest possible consultation of the citizens of the free Azawad.

This will particularly rely on our identity and our traditional social and political systems. These systems, which pre-existed and resisted both French colonization and Malian occupation, still have a great resonance in the collective memory and in successfully regulating relations between individuals and communities.

Such systems will serve as the basis for political and institutional organization of the Azawad state. The option for modern institutions and means to manage public services will allow our political system to adapt to the context in which our society develops and progresses.

In order to be close to the populations, the administration needs to be functioning starting from the local level, conducting close consultation with the communities which will ensure the management of their own affairs through elected institution.

Our election system will be devised in a way to allow a fair competition in conformity with a transparent process for which the state guarantees total respect of the election results.

Opposition forces will be encouraged to fulfil their role without political interference by the state. Multi-party democracy, free media and the dynamism of civil society will be guaranteed and will become the main democratic characteristics of the Azawad state.

For the sake of transparency and good governance, mechanisms which empower citizens to control the actions of the public authorities will be set up and endorsed by politicians and political forces. Under this angle, the political system makes accountability an urgent requirement.

Regarding this issue, we are committed to make use of anti-corruption mechanisms. Corruption is a phenomenon which had been alien to our people before it was injected in the body of our society by the Malian government's political and administrative actions.

The Azawad people have, for long, suffered the injustice and inequality imposed by the Malian colonial regime since 1960. We are committed to promoting an independent justice that will not be affected by the influence of other power institutions. The justice system which we advocate and devise for the Azawad will be endowed with appropriate control mechanisms at both domestic and external levels.

Respect and promotion of cultural and language specificities of the various components of society, which represent one of the bases of our struggle for the liberation of the Azawad, is absolutely essential in order to rehabilitate every historical element of the Azawad body which has been disintegrated by decades of feelings of contempt for our culture and of political uniformity imposed by the Bamako-based political elite.

Freedom of expression will flourish within the framework of democratic institutions which recognize the right of the populations through an inclusive and transparent electoral system.

Meticulous attention will be paid to the issue of equality between men and women. One of the main characteristics of the specificities of our society, of which we are proud, is the place, role and status which our society has given to women.

Our project of society does not only aim to safeguard this tradition and practice but also to fight against all alien and retrograde political and religious elements which stand in the face of progress and the march towards modernity.

Schooling of girls and boys and providing opportunities for both men and women to have access to highly rewarding jobs on the basis of meritocracy and not on the basis of their sex or ethnic origins, will be guaranteed.

Security will be central to the free Azawad political system. Through their institutions, the Azawad populations will ensure their own security and rid their territory of the threats presented by terrorists and drug-traffickers encouraged by the weakness and bankruptcy of the Malian state.

Our project is an effective and active response not only to our people's aspirations for a lasting peace, but also to the security concerns of neighbouring peoples - including the Malian people – and to the need to preserve stability in the region.

Only free and responsible Azawad people can defeat the dark forces which are threatening the Azawad, the sub-Saharan region and the rest of the world. No outside force, no matter how powerful and determined it is, can do better than our people. Our vision for the Azawad is to reiterate our commitment to work closely and to cooperate with any initiative that aims to combat the new threats to local and regional peace.

Responding to the social and economic needs of the population constitutes another key objective of our project of society. We will work to fulfil the aspirations of the populations which have been excluded, marginalized and discriminated against in all sectors of development, including basic needs such as access to education water and health.

Planning and development which will respond to the realities of our communities and to the specificities of our territory will provide the answer to a harmonious and balanced development of the Azawad. Decentralized development will be the best guarantee for a fairer redistribution of resources and for the common good.

The development of the infrastructure, including road and airport building, will be able to disenclave the free Azawad and connect it to our neighbours and the rest of the world.

Mali has constantly worked to play down the economic potential of our territory and to deny that pastoralism, the main pillar of the economy of the territory, is not productive. However, it has always been the Azawad stock breeding which supplied southern Mali and neighbouring countries with meat diet.

Our vision is to encourage the growth and exploitation of all the existing and potential natural resources of our territory, while taking into account the need to protect the environment and the interests of the future generations.

Special attention will be devoted to the mining industry, particularly energy resources. Their exploitation will be subjected to strict regulation so that the Azawad populations benefit the most, while according great respect to our biotope which allowed the Azawad people to resist and survive various shocks.

We will put particular emphasis on modern ways of exploiting clean energy resources, such as the sun and the wind, with which nature has blessed our territory.

In short, we will firmly put our own mark on our attachment to nature in so far as we are the indigenous people, and voice our concern to safeguard and value the environment for the good of our people and in solidarity with other peoples.

Our movement will spare no effort to proclaim the rights of the Azawad people who have been victims of repression by the Malian state which has been acting with impunity in managing its power for more than 50 years. We will fight against all kinds of impunity and we will provide all the help we can to eradicate it.

We will continue to fight till the end to defend the interests of our refugees and those displaced by force from their homes in the Azawad in order to improve their living conditions and alleviate their distress. Our movement is working out a strategy in order to bring their exile to an end and to prepare their return to their land.

Our project of society should not be seen by any people, state or nation as a threat or an attack against their security or national interests. Our deep sense of responsibility, together with our strong will to live in harmony with other peoples, constitute a firm guarantee for our neighbours.

The MNLA acts in accordance with the spirit of justice and equality and calls for human solidarity, the solidarity of the UN, of regional and international organizations (African Union, European Union; regional and international human rights bodies (ICRC, HRW, Amnesty International ...) to end the tragedy which the Azawad people have been suffering in silence since 1960.

We urge them to act immediately in order to avoid a part of humanity being sacrificed on the altar of selfish geopolitical and strategic stakes and outdated principles.

Finally, in the last 20 years the Malian state has made efforts to ease the marginalization of the Azawad populations. The established fact, however, is distressing. The Malian government has proved its limits and inability to take into consideration our needs, interests and specificities.

For all these reasons, we demand to freely exercise our inalienable right to self-determination, in accordance with and as stipulated by international law and human rights conventions.