

UN addresses militia turmoil

The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) is urging countries to provide international protection and asylum to people fleeing the increasingly chaotic conditions in Mali. The country's 2015 peace and reconciliation agreement has all but collapsed as several rebel groups affiliated with a loose coalition of militias have failed to respect its provisions. **Voice of America** reports that UNCHR says the armed factions and Islamist extremist groups operating in the country have been escalating the fighting. The conflict, which had been mainly waged in northern Mali, has spread to the central Mopti region and some parts of the southern region. The UN says government authorities and institutions are largely powerless to stop the increasing turmoil. **UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic said civilians, politicians, civil servants and security forces were being targeted and killed.** Local populations, particularly in central regions, report widespread human rights violations, including summary executions, disappearances, torture and arbitrary arrests. 'The crisis has a devastating and disproportionate effect on Malian children,' Mahecic said. 'Children are being forcibly recruited by armed groups, kidnapped and killed.' He added that more than 285 000 children are being denied education due to school closures.