

Burkina junta rallies supporters after claimed coup 'plot'

AFP – Several thousand people rallied in support of Burkina Faso's ruling junta Wednesday, days after the military authorities said they had uncovered a "plot" to overthrow the government.

Demonstrators carried giant posters of junta leader Captain Ibrahim Traore and Burkinabe and Russian flags.

With placards bearing slogans such as: "Down with imperialism and its local lackeys" and "Full support for President Ibrahim Traore and the people of Burkina Faso", they gathered in a central square in the capital Ouagadougou.

It was one of the biggest pro-junta demonstrations since Traore seized power in a September 2022 coup in the west African country, which has been battling jihadist attacks for a decade that have killed tens of thousands of people.

On April 21, the junta claimed to have undone a "major plot" planned by masterminds in neighbouring Ivory Coast, with the arrests of several top army officials.

Traore has regularly accused Ivory Coast of harbouring his opponents, allegations its neighbour rejects.

Over more than a year, the junta has detained several dozen military officers, including former gendarmerie chief of staff Evrard Somda, accusing them of plotting or of attempting to destabilise republican institutions.

Authorities regularly repress dissent, notably within civil society and the media, claiming it as part of the anti-jihadist battle.

Prime Minister Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouedraogo addressed the rally which was also attended by several ministers and MPs and called by the National Coordination of the Civilian Vigil (CNAVC), a coalition of pro-junta civil society groups.

“We must stand up more than ever because when the people stand up, the imperialists tremble,” the prime minister told the crowd.

Rallies condemning the “hypocrisy” of former colonial powers also took place in Burkina’s second biggest city Bobo Dioulasso and in Boromo.

“We, peoples who love justice and sovereignty, affirm our unwavering solidarity with the heroic struggle of the Burkinabe people for their emancipation,” a CNAVC spokesman said.

– ‘We are a shield’ –

“This mobilisation is proof that the people are committed to their leaders,” Ghislain Some, CNAVC secretary general, said.

“The people are standing up, mobilised and united behind captain Ibrahim Traore. We will never be able to harm our president or destabilise our country. We are a shield,” Some said.

Adama Kima, one of the organisers, said on national television that the rally was also to denounce remarks attributed to US Africa Command chief General Michael Langley accusing Traore of using the country’s gold reserves for personal protection at the expense of the well-being of the people.

Like its neighbours Niger and Mali, Burkina Faso under Traore has turned away from its former colonial master France and moved closer to Russia.

All three of those Sahel states have been battling violence by jihadists linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group for a

decade.

The three junta-led countries quit the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) at the beginning of the year, accusing the regional bloc of being subservient to France, and have formed the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), originally set up as a defence pact in 2023 but which now seeks closer integration.

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