

## “And what does the UN say about Venezuela?”

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the Sahel

16 February 2026

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 12 January - 08 February 2026, assessing observed narratives based on 14 months of systematic social media monitoring in [Burkina Faso](#), [Mali](#) and [Niger](#).



Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations.

By tracking both emerging and entrenched narratives on social media, this briefing provides insight into how public sentiment towards aid actors in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is developing. It aims to support policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

This briefing is part of a longer-term initiative for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to examine how aid agency acceptance or rejection is expressed on social media. The content is selected based on predefined lists of UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations and general key words related to humanitarian and development assistance. Comments associated with posts that attracted the highest number of comments were analysed qualitatively to identify dominant narratives. This edition covers examples of

- **High-mobilisation backlash against UN condemnation of political parties suspension in Burkina Faso.**
- **Low-engagement but broadly accepted institutional aid communication, including high-level meetings between aid actors and state authorities and gender-related programming, where formal, report-style content generated limited interaction and largely neutral-to-positive sentiment.**
- **High-visibility material donations as flashpoints for mixed reactions, illustrated by Qatar Charity’s support in Burkina Faso, which generated approval for tangible assistance alongside persistent suspicion around intent, conditionality and geopolitical influence.**

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger but highlights the narratives that are most visible. Public sentiment towards the aid sector develops over time, shaped by how individuals interpret and connect social media content through the lens of personal experience and prior exposure. To build and sustain acceptance in digital spaces, policymakers and practitioners need strategies that respond with appropriately adapted communication to these shifting online sentiments as part of broader acceptance and security approaches.

**Niger airport incidents (29 January 2026):** Armed militants carried out an assault on Diori Hamani International Airport in **Niamey**. Islamic State-linked groups claimed responsibility for the assault. The attack caused damage to several aircraft and infrastructure at the site, which also accommodates a military base. In the aftermath, Niger’s military ruler publicly accused the leaders of France, Benin and Ivory Coast of sponsoring the attack. None of the social media posts or comments analysed in this briefing referenced the aid sector in relation to these events, but the association of violent incidents with specific states highlights the broader risk environment, as such narratives can contribute to perceived links between external actors, aid organisations and insecurity in the public mind.

**Past editions:** [Even more unemployment](#) (05-11 Jan), [Hope They Aren’t Wearing Microphones](#) (15 Dec-04 Jan), [Madam, You Are Mistaken, You Are Not Nigerien](#) (08-14 Dec), [The AES Must Continue Its Fight](#) (01-07 Dec), [All](#)

## Key Takeaways

### UN criticism of the suspension of political parties in Burkina Faso (06–07 February)

Between 06–07 February 2026, four Facebook posts published by regional media outlets relayed the UN's condemnation of Burkina Faso's decision to dissolve political parties. Two posts circulated in Burkina Faso and two in Niger. Collectively, the posts reached approximately **25K users** and generated **2,034 comments**, accounting for **around 60% of all comments** collected across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger during the reporting period. **Approximately 96% of comments were negative** towards the UN or the international aid system more broadly. Rather than prompting debate on party suspension itself, the posts triggered a highly polarised, repetitive and hostile discourse centred on sovereignty, rejection of external authority, and delegitimisation of the UN.

### Key narratives

- **The UN as illegitimate, irrelevant, or “non-existent”**: A dominant and recurring narrative portrays the UN as having no credibility. Comments frequently questioned “who” or “what” the UN is, framing it as a useless, or already dissolved entity.

“**What does the UN represent for whom?**” (“L'ONU représente quoi pour qui????”)

- **Sovereignty**: Many comments framed the suspension of political parties as a purely internal matter, asserting that Burkina Faso “belongs to the Burkinabè” and that no international organisation has the right to comment.

“**Our country is not the property of the UN. We are sovereign.**” (“Notre pays n'est pas la propriété de l'ONU. Nous sommes souverains.”)

- **“Double standards” framing**: A highly repetitive pattern involves redirecting the discussion away from Burkina Faso towards other international crises. Venezuela, OPT, Ukraine, Iran, and the actions of the United States—often personalised through Donald Trump—are cited as proof of UN hypocrisy.

“**The terrorist thug who is the UN Secretary-General must first address burning issues such as Trump's savagery in terrorizing President Maduro and leave us alone.**” (“Le voyous terroriste secrétaire général de l'ONU doit parler d'abord des dossiers brûlants tel que la sauvagerie de Trump d'aller terroriser le président Maduro et nous laisser tranquille”)

“**Many Arab countries have no political parties, and what does the UN say?**” (“Beaucoup de pays arabes n'ont pas de partis politiques et l'ONU dit quoi????”)

- **The UN as a proxy for Western or imperial interests**: The UN is frequently conflated with Western states, particularly France and the United States, and portrayed as an instrument of imperialism or neo-colonial control.

“**They never stop their charade. The UN is a tool that imperialism uses to attack us.**” (“Ceux là ils n'arrêtent jamais leur comédie l'ONU est un instrument que l'impérialisme utilise pour nous attaquer”)

- **Association of the UN with terrorism and insecurity**: A notable subset of comments explicitly linked the UN and international organisations to the financing or protection of armed groups.

“UN = terrorist organization. What does the UN say about: 1) the kidnapping of Maduro, a democratically elected president? 2) Israel’s bombing of Gaza? 3) France’s proven financing of terrorism? etc.... The list goes on. We get it. Ms. UN, you are no longer credible.”  
 (“Onu=organisation terroriste. Que dit l’onu: 1/enlèvement de Maduro, président démocratiquement élu? 2/Bombardement de Gaza par Israël? 3/financement avéré du terrorisme par la France? etc.... la liste est longue. On vous a compris. Mme ONU, vous n’êtes plus crédible.”)

## What this tells us

- **UN criticism is a high-mobilisation trigger:** The concentration of comments on this issue shows that perceived external interference, particularly by the UN, activates far higher engagement than local aid-related developments.
- **Anti-multilateral sentiment is entrenched rather than reactive:** The discourse reflects a settled worldview in which the UN and international institutions are seen as inherently illegitimate, regardless of the specific issue.
- **Democracy promotion narratives carry reputational risk:** References to political parties, elections, or democratic norms are widely interpreted as foreign imposition rather than neutral governance principles.
- **Spillover risk for aid actors is significant:** Although triggered by a UN position, hostility extends to “international organisations” in general, reinforcing a broader environment of suspicion towards external aid and governance actors.
- **Potential security implications for aid workers:** The explicit conflation of the UN and international organisations with terrorism narratives increases reputational exposure and may heighten security risks for staff on the ground, particularly in contexts where public hostility can translate into harassment, obstruction, or reduced community acceptance.

**Online reactions to high-level meetings with authorities:** Accounting for 112 posts, representing approximately **15 percent of all posts** collected during the reporting period, this content category captures formal meetings between aid organisations and state authorities across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Of these posts, 23 originated from, or were published by, state-linked or official government accounts. Organisational visibility was dominated by multilateral actors, with 72 posts from UN agencies, alongside 27 posts from or explicitly mentioning INGOs, 11 from local NGOs (LNGOs), and one post referencing a donor. Despite its scale and institutional prominence, the content attracted minimal interaction and very little critical response: the 112 posts drew just 142 comments in total, only 14 of which were negative. The frequent visual presence of ministers, governors, and senior officials - often in military uniform - could play a moderating role. This could discourage overt public dissent and channel reactions toward politeness, or expressions of national loyalty. Where criticism did emerge, it centred on distrust of international organisations, warnings against renewed engagement with Western and Arab states, and suspicions that external actors were driven by geopolitical interests and resource extraction rather than genuine support for national development.

## Social media posts on gender-related topics generate limited but mainly positive engagement

A review of selected gender-related posts published by UN agencies, international NGOs, and local NGOs shows **limited but consistently neutral to positive engagement**. Across the sample, communication choices, visual framing, and thematic focus all contribute to a pattern of broad acceptance without mobilisation. Unlike political or governance-related narratives, gender-related content from girls education, women’s health initiatives and gender based violence, occupies a relatively uncontested space

in the online discourse of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger since at least October 2025 (see the following briefings for more details: [13-19 Oct](#); [20-26 Oct](#); [27 Oct-09 Nov](#); [10-16 Nov](#); [17-30 Nov](#); [01-07 Dec](#)).

**“Congratulations to UNFPA for this crucial initiative. Maternal and neonatal health is a priority, especially in regions such as Diffa and Zinder. The delivery of these supplies and medicines is an important step toward reducing maternal and perinatal mortality. FEVS congratulates UNFPA and the Ministry of Health for their commitment.”** (“Bravo à l'UNFPA pour cette initiative cruciale . La santé maternelle et néonatale est une priorité, surtout dans des régions comme Diffa et Zinder. La remise de ces matériels et médicaments est un pas important pour réduire la mortalité maternelle et périnatale. FEVS félicite l'UNFPA et le Ministère de la Santé pour leur engagement.”)

- **Institutional, report-like language dampens interaction:** Most posts adopt a formal, informational tone, closely resembling activity reports or press releases. They emphasise mandates, objectives, figures, and outcomes. This style reinforces credibility and professionalism but leaves little room for emotional connection or debate, encouraging short, polite reactions rather than sustained discussion.
- **Activities presented as concluded, not participatory:** The majority of posts describe completed actions (meetings held, materials delivered, training conducted). As a result, audiences position themselves as observers rather than participants, limiting engagement to acknowledgement and encouragement.
- **Visuals signal legitimacy and normalcy:** Images typically show formal meetings, official ceremonies, group training, or sensitisation activities. These visuals reinforce institutional legitimacy but do not provoke strong emotional responses. The absence of confrontational imagery or distressing visuals reduces the likelihood of polarisation while also limiting virality.
- **Local NGO presence strengthens legitimacy but not mobilisation:** Posts from local NGOs anchor gender issues in familiar community contexts and reduce perceptions of external imposition.

## What this tells us

- **Low engagement reflects format, not rejection:** Limited comments are primarily the result of institutional communication styles rather than public disinterest or hostility.
- **Gender programming retains strong social legitimacy:** Neutral-to-positive sentiment could indicate growing acceptance across all three countries.
- **Localisation reduces risk but not passivity:** LNGO involvement reinforces trust but does not automatically increase interaction.

## Burkina Faso: donations by Qatar Charity generate mixed reactions

Between 4–5 February, seven posts (six on Facebook and one on X) published in Burkina Faso focused on large-scale donations by Qatar Charity. Collectively, these posts reached approximately **300K users**, making them among the highest-reach topics in the reporting period. Engagement was also comparatively high, with 130 comments recorded, of which 16% were negative.

- **Material usefulness as a primary source of approval:** Positive comments consistently emphasised the concrete nature of the donation (tricycles, sewing machines, chairs, solar lamps), often contrasting it favourably with previous forms of assistance such as religious infrastructure.

**“In any case it is concrete. Thank you to the donor.”** (“Entouka c'est du concret. Merci au donateur.”)

“Here it’s a donation, but others talk to us about mosques” (“Ici c’est un don, mais d’autres nous parlent de mosquée”)

- **Persistent suspicion of intent and conditionality:** A significant share of negative comments questioned the motives behind the donation, frequently invoking ideas of hidden agendas, conditionality, or future political leverage. Recurrent references to terrorism financing, or geopolitical manipulation indicate that Gulf-based donors trigger similar suspicion dynamics compared to Western or multilateral actors.

“We hope it won’t be conditional. 😊” (“Nous espérons que ça ne sera pas conditionné. 😊”)

“The double-shelled turtles. They support the states and at the same time they support the terrorists 😡😡😡” (“Les tortues a double carapace . Ils soutiennent les états et ils soutiennent en même temps les terroristes 😡😡😡”)

- **National sovereignty discourse:** Several comments framed acceptance of the donation as acceptable only because it was a donation, not a loan, while others questioned why a sovereign country should rely on external charity at all. Two commenters also found the term “vulnerable” itself problematic, reflecting sensitivities around dignity, labelling, and dependency.

“The vulnerable name must now give way to other, less derogatory words” (“Le nom vulnérable doit laisser la place maintenant à d’autres mot moins méprisant”)

## What this tells us

- **Tangible aid increases approval but does not neutralise distrust:** Even widely welcomed material support does not erase entrenched suspicions around funding sources and geopolitical intent.
- **Aid framed as charity invites moral and ideological debate:** Unlike state-aligned or multilateral aid, charitable donations activate questions of dignity, dependency, and hidden influence.
- **Visibility amplifies both support and contestation:** High-reach donation narratives function as discursive flashpoints, revealing underlying anxieties about sovereignty, religion, and external influence in Burkina Faso.

## Key numbers

Because social media connects local experiences with external audiences, comment language is a key indicator of how local and external narratives interact. The distribution of comments by organisation type reflects the complex structure of the aid sector, in which UN agencies, international organisations, and local civil society operate with different mandates and levels of visibility, and are therefore perceived in distinct ways. Negative sentiment is highlighted separately because, even when limited in volume, it can play an outsized role in generating harmful narratives, including misinformation, delegitimisation, and disinformation, with implications for acceptance, access, and staff safety.

### Scale of analysis

- **Number of posts: 704**
- **Estimated total reach: 7.8 million** social media users
- **Total comments analysed: 3,388**

### Comment distribution by organisation type

- **UN standalone:** 2,319 comments (68.4%)
- **UN agency:** 245 comments (7.2%)
- **LNGOs:** 335 comments (9.9%)
- **INGOs:** 231 comments (6.8%)
- **International development actors:** 138 comments (4.1%)
- **International humanitarian actors:** 97 comments (2.9%)
- **Donors:** 4 comments (0.1%)
- **General aid sector:** 19 comments (0.6%)

### Distribution of negative comments by actor type:

- **UN standalone:** 1,097 negative comments (95.1%)
- **UN agency:** 19 negative comments (1.6%)
- **LNGOs:** 3 negative comments (0.3%)
- **INGOs:** 23 negative comments (2.0%)
- **International humanitarian actors:** 7 negative comments (0.6%)
- **Donors:** 1 negative comment (0.1%)
- **General aid sector:** 3 negative comments (0.3%)

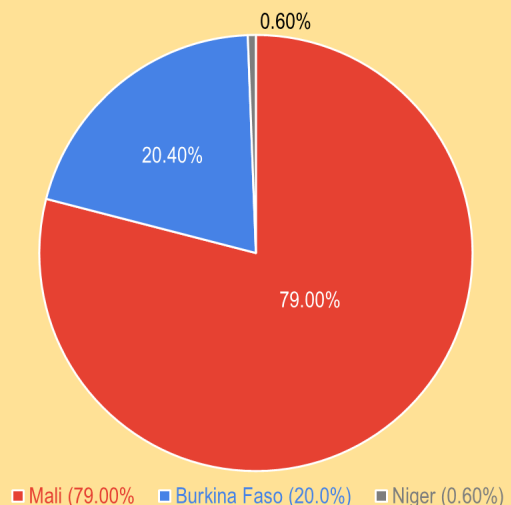
### Posts mentioning or published by :

- **57 LNGO and CSOs**
- **33 INGOs**
- **16 UN agencies**

### Comment language

- **French:** 3,297 comments
- **Emojis / no text:** 67 comments
- **English:** 16 comments
- **Arabic:** 8 comments
- **Hausa:** 1 comment

### Negative comments targeting the aid sector, by country (12 January-08 February 2026)



## Other resources

**Insecurity Insight regularly examines key discussions around aid activities driven by information posted by IP addresses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Syria.** Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations. **Subscribe** to our Social Media Monitoring mailing list for regular updates.

## Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research. This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles. This document is funded and supported by the European Union (EU). The opinions expressed in the report do not in any way reflect the position of the EU who are not responsible for the content expressed in this document.

We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: [info@insecurityinsight.org](mailto:info@insecurityinsight.org). Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our **Social Media Monitoring** mailing list. Find more resources at the **Social Media Monitoring** website. **Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link: <https://bit.ly/12Jan-08Feb2026SMMBrief>**

**Suggested citation: Insecurity Insight. 2026. Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Emerging Trends in the Sahel, 12Jan-08Feb2026, Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. <https://bit.ly/12Jan-08Feb2026SMMBrief>**

