

Donors pledge \$455 million to Mali military push - Tehran Times

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ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — African and Western nations on Tuesday pledged more than \$450 million to fund an African-led military force to fight extremists in Mali.

Britain, meanwhile, announced that it has offered to send up to 200 military officers to help train a West African force in Mali, including up to 40 people that could be sent to Mali as part of an EU training mission of 500 personnel. At the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia, a top official, Ramtane Lamamra, said nations had pledged \$455.5 million for the United Nations-authorized, African-led Support Mission in Mali, or AFISMA. The AU says AFISMA requires an initial budget of \$461 million. Additional support needed for Mali's army and the West African bloc known as ECOWAS raises the overall financial need to near \$960 million.

African nations like Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Gambia and others lined up with developed countries like the United States, Japan, Germany and the UK to pledge funds to the military effort. Among the pledges of assistance:

- The EU pledged 50 million Euros (\$67 million).
- Germany promised \$20 million and a third aircraft to help transport African troops.
- Britain said it will provide a ferry to help transport equipment and French troops and will allow allies like the United States to fly refueling missions from UK bases.
- Japan announced \$120 million in aid and support to refugees, the Kyodo news agency said.

Johnnie Carson, the State Department's top Africa official, said at the African Union gathering that U.S. assistance for the Mali effort would total \$96 million. Carson said that includes \$32 million previously pledged and \$13 million already spent aiding military efforts.

Germany's foreign minister, Guido Westerwelle, said that despite the necessity of the military mission "in the long-term there can only be a political solution" to Mali's problems.

Extremists have controlled much of northern Mali since last April. French forces began an operation earlier this month to dislodge them. A top U.S. State Department official warned on Monday that the military effort could take years to complete.