

# Six-year-old becomes first in Mali to have open heart surgery

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A six-year-old girl became Mali's first open heart surgery patient on Monday, after a successful procedure performed by a team of Malian and French surgeons that was a first for the African nation.

Fanta Diarra, who was diagnosed with a heart condition when she was just a baby, underwent the operation in what medics hope will be the first of many such life-saving operations for Malians who previously have had to travel overseas for treatment.

"I am happy that I will be operated on. I will be like the other children, I will be able to work, and get married," the bubbly six-year-old told AFP before her surgery.

She is one of some 2,500 children awaiting surgery, of whom about 50 should be operated on by the end of the year at a new cardio-pediatric unit at a hospital in Bamako, opened by the French medical association La Chaine de l'Espoir.

"It's a big day for us. This is the first open-heart surgery, but behind this [surgery](#) there are hundreds and hundreds of [children](#) who are waiting, so we know this is not the end," said Professor Alain Deloche, a cardiac surgeon and founder of La Chaine de l'Espoir.

The aim is for French surgical teams to perform the operations, while also training Malian surgeons.

"I can see in the eyes of these young Malian surgeons something that looks like pride," he added.

Malian cardio-vascular surgeon, Doctor Baba Ibrahima Diarra, said local teams needed help initially because the operation was new in the country.

But he added: "The final goal is to be independent in time, to be completely autonomous."

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