

Central African Republic



Issa Sallet Adoum also known as Bozize, Ousman Yaouba, and Mahamat Tahir, three members of the armed group called “Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation,” or 3R, accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity, await their trial at the courthouse in Bangui, Central African Republic, April 19, 2022.

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Despite a unilateral ceasefire declared by President Faustin Archange Touadéra in October 2021, ongoing conflicts in the Central African Republic continued to seriously affect civilians in 2022. Fighting between the national army, alongside Russian mercenaries and Rwandan forces, and elements of the [Coalition of Patriots for Change](#) (Coalition des patriotes pour le changement, CPC) was at times intense, with dozens of civilians killed in some attacks.

Security conditions [hampered](#) humanitarian relief and grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law have resulted in high numbers of refugees and internally displaced people.

Russian mercenaries from Wagner—a Russian private military security contractor with apparent links to the Russian government—are deployed in the country. Rumors around Wagner’s official presence circulated for years, which government officials have denied. But in June, Fidèle Gouandjika, minister special advisor to the president, suggested to international media that forces were indeed from Wagner.

The group’s control over some road checkpoints makes travel difficult outside the capital, Bangui. While officially in the country to serve as military instructors, in the past the United Nations had [reported](#) several instances in which these mercenaries participated in active fighting and were implicated in human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law.

Russian speaking forces, possibly from Wagner, carried out an [attack](#) in Ouham province, outside Bossangoa, killing at least 12 people in July 2021. The government committed to investigate the crime via a special commission of inquiry that at time of writing had yet to publish any findings. The UN reported that foreign forces, possibly from Russia, [recruited](#) anti-balaka militia to fight other armed groups.

The country remained dangerous for humanitarian actors, with over 87 attacks on them registered between January and July.

Attacks on Civilians

From December 6 to 13, 2021, anti-balaka fighters carried out an attack on the village of Boyo in Ouaka province, [according](#) to the UN. Over the course of the eight days, at least 20 civilians were killed, 5 women and girls raped, at least 547 houses burned and looted, and more than 1,000 villagers forced to flee.

In March, the rebel group Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation (3R) launched attacks against civilians in Ouham-Pendé province, including at [Nzakoundou](#) where at least four civilians were killed.

In May, the Union for Peace in Central Africa (UPC) attacked a village and killed at least 10 civilians in Bokolobo, Ouaka province, [according](#) to the UN. The UPC's military leader Ali Darassa, who is also the chief of staff for the CPC, [claimed](#) the attacks were carried out by the national army and its allies.

In a February meeting at the UN security council, the United States [accused](#) fighters from Wagner of committing serious human rights abuses, including the summary execution of 30 people in Aïgbandou, Haute Kotto province, in January. Russia said the accusations were not verified.

[Media](#) and other sources have made allegations about Russian mercenaries carrying out attacks on artisanal miners in the border zones between Central African Republic and Sudan from March to May.

Constitutional Referendum

In March, Touadéra's party, the United Hearts Movement (Mouvement Cœurs unis, MCU), [attempted](#) to introduce a constitutional amendment that would remove the two-term limit and allow the president to run for a third term. Touadéra was first elected in 2016 and was re-elected in 2020 amid a military offensive by the CPC. The changes were first proposed during a “republican dialogue”—promised by Touadéra after his re-election in 2020—which was boycotted by most of the opposition. The proposals sparked an outcry from civil society and the opposition. Nonetheless, in May, political allies of President Touadéra again [proposed](#) changes to the constitution that would let him keep running for office, prompting opposition protests.

In August, Touadéra [announced](#) a constitutional referendum. Later that month he created a committee responsible for drafting a new constitution to propose changes to enable him to run for a third term.

In September, the Constitutional Court [ruled](#) in response to a petition filed by a civil society group that the decree setting up the committee “was not in compliance with the country’s constitution.”

On October 17, the minister in charge of the general secretariat of the government and relations with institutions, Maxime Balalou, announced the retirement of the president of the Constitutional Court, Danièle Darlan, and instructed the government to take steps to replace her. On October 19, Darlan wrote to Balalou stating that the minister’s decision to dismiss a judge from the court is unconstitutional and reiterated her intentions to finish her term, set to expire in March 2024. Danièle Darlan was dismissed on October 24 by presidential decree.

The next presidential vote is scheduled for 2025.

Justice for Serious Crimes

In March 2022, Chad [surrendered](#) a former anti-balaka military coordinator, Maxime Mokom, to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Mokom had fled to Chad after having taken part in the CPC's unsuccessful bid to take Bangui in 2020. Mokom had previously been one of the highest ranked anti-balaka leaders in the country and in 2019 was appointed minister for disarmament, demobilization, re-integration, and repatriation under a failed peace deal. The ICC had [issued](#) his arrest warrant under seal in 2018 on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed between December 5, 2013, and at least December 2014.

In April, the Special Criminal Court (SCC)—part of the domestic justice system but which has both national and international staff and benefits from extensive UN and other international assistance—opened its [first trial](#). The case is against three suspects from the 3R rebel group, Issa Sallet Adoum, Ousman Yaouba, and Tahir Mahamat, who are accused of being responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity [committed](#) in May 2019 in Koundjili and Lemouna in Ouham Pende province. On October 31, the court [convicted](#) the three men of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In August, the ICC made public an arrest warrant for [Nouredine Adam](#), the former number [two](#) of the Seleka. The [warrant](#), which dates to January 2019, states that Adam is wanted on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including torture. He is [reportedly](#) currently in Sudan. Adam oversaw Seleka fighters, and Human Rights Watch [documented](#) how fighters under his command likely committed atrocities in Bangui and nearby areas since 2013. After he fled Bangui in 2014, Adam took command of other armed [groups](#) in the northeast of the country.

In September, the ICC trial of Seleka commander Mahamat Said Abdel Kani began in The Hague. Said is accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Bangui in 2013 and was an “immediate subordinate” of Adam, [according](#) to the court. He is the first Seleka leader to face charges before the ICC.

The trials of anti-balaka leaders [Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona](#) and [Alfred Yékatom](#) continued at the ICC. The charges against both include war crimes and crimes against humanity committed between December 2013 and December 2014. Ngaïssona was arrested in France and transferred to the ICC in December 2018. Yékatom was transferred to the ICC by Central African Republic authorities in November 2018.

Hassan Bouba, a government minister, who faces [charges](#) for war crimes and crimes against humanity at the SCC [remained](#) a fugitive. Bouba was a leader of the UPC and in 2017, he was named a special councilor to the president, and later became the minister of livestock and animal health. The UPC started committing serious abuses in the Ouaka province in [2014](#). Bouba was expelled from the group in January 2021. In late November 2021, national gendarmes [released](#) Bouba from detention in defiance of SCC orders and escorted him home. He was scheduled to appear before the SCC that day for a custody hearing but did not do so.

Displacement and Humanitarian Needs

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained high due to fighting. Over 1.3 million Central Africans, [according](#) to the UN, were either refugees in neighboring countries (735,000) or internally displaced (654,000) as of September 2022. Conditions for IDPs and refugees, many of whom stay in camps, remained harsh. Assistance to IDPs was seriously hampered by [attacks](#) on humanitarians and general insecurity in the country.

About [3.1 million](#) people, out of a population of 4.9 million, needed humanitarian assistance. The humanitarian response plan was underfunded, with a [budget gap](#) of around US\$136 million as of September 2022.

Women and Girls' Rights

Insecurity and ongoing violence created a hostile environment for women and girls. Sexual violence remains a threat for women and girls, particularly for those who are internally displaced. According to the 2021 Human Development Report, the country ranks 159 out of 162 countries with a gender inequality index of 0.680. Women are underrepresented in decision-making and suffer one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.

Girls are severely affected by unwanted pregnancies and child marriage: 229 per 1,000 adolescent girls and women ages 15 to 19 gave birth; and 68 percent of girls are married before turning 18. The country has the second highest prevalence of child marriage globally.

Children's Rights

The UN verified that at least 329 children, some as young as age 7, were recruited by parties to the conflict in 2021, including by national armed forces. At least 104 children were killed or maimed, primarily from gunshots and crossfire. The UN verified 211 cases of rape or other sexual violence against girls. At least 52 schools were attacked, including 26 by government or pro-government forces, and an additional 55 schools were used for military purposes, primarily by government forces.

Key International Actors

The [UN Security Council](#) and the [United States](#) imposed sanctions on Ali Darassa, the leader of the UPC, in December 2021. As the group's founder and leader, he was implicated in serious human rights abuses, including the killing of civilians, torture, rape and causing displacement.

Under the Child Soldier Prevention Act, the US added the Central African Republic to its list of governments using child soldiers for the first time since 2014. The designation entails sanctions on military assistance, in the absence of a presidential waiver.

The UN peacekeeping mission, [MINUSCA](#), deployed 11,598 military peacekeepers and 2,085 police across many parts of the country. Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the mission is authorized to take all necessary means to protect the civilian population from the threat of physical violence and to "implement a mission-wide protection strategy." In November 2021, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the mission for an additional year.

In April, the governments of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, and South Sudan adopted a [declaration](#) aimed at creating regional action to help displaced Central Africans.