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Central African Republic

Head of state: Catherine Samba-Panza

Head of government: Mahamat Kamoun

Crimes under international law such as war crimes and crimes against humanity were regularly committed, including killings, mutilation of bodies, abductions, recruitment and use of child soldiers and forced displacement of populations. In December 2013 a coalition of the mainly Christian and animist anti-Balaka armed groups attacked the capital Bangui and the mostly Muslim Séléka forces retaliated, killing dozens of civilians. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) – which replaced the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) in September 2014 – has not stopped or prevented abuses in the region. Many of those suspected of criminal responsibility, including commanders of the Séléka, anti-Balaka, and their allies, have not been investigated or arrested and no action has been taken to bring them to justice.

Background

Violence continued in the Central African Republic (CAR) despite the deployment of MINUSCA, in September 2014, and the presence of French forces (known as Sangaris) and European Union forces (EUFOR). Deadly attacks against civilians, including on those in sites for internally displaced persons (IDP), by the anti-Balaka, Séléka and armed Peulh fighters (members of the Peulh ethnic group) continued. According to the UN, in mid-November, 7,451 military and 1,083 police personnel had been deployed to MINUSCA.

On 10 January, Séléka leader and CAR President Michel Djotodia resigned following pressure from the international community and CAR civil society organizations. Catherine Samba-Panza was sworn in as the new Transitional President on 23 January.

On 7 February 2014 the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced a new preliminary examination into crimes allegedly committed in the CAR since September 2012. In September, the Office of the Prosecutor announced its conclusion that there was a reasonable basis for investigating crimes defined under the Rome Statute committed in CAR since September 2012.

On 11 July, a Séléka congress designated former President Djotodia and former commander and Minister Nourredine Adam as the group's president and vice-president respectively. Those two individuals are under UN and US sanctions for their alleged involvement in human rights violations and abuses.

Prime Minister André Nzapayéké and his entire cabinet resigned following the ceasefire agreement signed in July 2014 in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo, by armed groups' representatives, political parties, churches and civil society organizations. On 22 August, Transitional President Samba-Panza appointed the new Prime Minister Mahamat Kamoun.

On 7 August, a memorandum of understanding was signed between MINUSCA and the government to “establish a Special Jurisdiction created by national legislation, in which international judicial and prosecutorial executive functions would be attached to a national judicial body”. However, legislation for the “Special Criminal Court” has yet to be passed and no funding has been provided.

Fresh violence erupted in the capital Bangui in mid-October. A series of violent incidents occurred in Bangui, with MINUSCA forces facing protests and attacks. At least a dozen people were killed and thousands were forced to flee and live in camps for IDPs. Escalating violence by the Séléka, armed Peulh fighters and anti-Balaka was observed in the central region, especially around the city of Bambari. On 9 October 2014, a MINUSCA convoy was attacked leaving one peacekeeper dead, another severely wounded, and seven others injured. Sporadic clashes between anti-Balaka fighters and international forces, including EUFOR, continued. According to UNHCR, the October violence displaced some 6,500 people in Bangui, but that number could be higher. As of October 2014 there were 410,000 IDPs and some 420,000 people had fled to neighbouring countries.

On 29 October, the UN Panel of Experts on CAR released its final report which highlighted credible evidence of crimes under international law committed by armed groups. It also referred to the exploitation of natural resources by armed groups; the illicit transfer of arms and ammunition; arms proliferation; and violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks on schools and hospitals, sexual violence and the use of child soldiers.

By the end of 2014, anti-Balaka and Séléka groups lacked co-ordination, leading to the creation of various other groups among them. The mostly Muslim Séléka forces clashed with the mainly Christian and animist anti-Balaka militia. All sides systematically targeted civilians believed to support the other side’s fighters.

On 10 December, MINUSCA announced that it had arrested Abdel Kader “Baba Ladde”, leader of the Chadian armed group Popular Front for Recovery near Kabo at the border with Chad. Baba Ladde and members of his armed group had been accused of attacking civilians in northern CAR and recruiting child soldiers.

Abuses by armed groups

Abuses by Séléka

Séléka forces were allegedly responsible for serious human rights abuses, including killings, burning houses and villages mostly belonging to Christians, forced displacement of the populations and enforced disappearances. Christian communities frequently attributed responsibility for Séléka’s abuses to the country’s Muslim minority; acts of retaliation were reported and the already serious sectarian divisions deepened. No effective investigations were conducted into most incidents.

On 22 January, more than 100 Christian civilians including children were allegedly killed by Séléka fighters and armed Muslim civilians in Baoro. On 17 April, Father Wilibona was allegedly killed by Séléka and armed Peulh fighters after being ambushed at Tale village. On 26 April, 16 people, including 13 local leaders and three aid workers from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), were killed by a Séléka group, prompting MSF to reduce its CAR activities. On 7 July, 26 people were killed

and 35 seriously wounded during an attack at a church and IDP site in Bambari. More than 10,000 people fled. On 1 October, Séléka fighters attacked an IDP camp next to the MINUSCA base in Bambari (which accommodated Christian and animist IDPs). Several people were killed. On 10 October, Séléka fighters attacked an IDP site in the Catholic Church compound in Dekoa. Nine civilians including a pregnant woman were killed and several wounded.

Abductions by Séléka

In April, the Séléka in Batangafo abducted a bishop and three priests. They were later released following negotiation between the authorities, the Catholic Church and Séléka commanders. Those allegedly responsible for the abduction were identifiable but no investigation was opened.

Abuses by the anti-Balaka

Anti-Balaka armed group members were responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity. They were the main perpetrators of abuses committed against Muslims in Bangui and in western CAR, especially following the former President's resignation in January 2014, and the retreat of most Séléka forces to the northeastern region.

Since 8 January 2014, a series of deadly attacks on Muslims were carried out across western CAR. Some attacks were allegedly carried out in revenge for the previous killing of Christians by Séléka forces and armed Muslims. On 16 January, 20 civilians were killed and dozens injured outside the town of Bouar, when their vehicle was attacked by anti-Balaka militias. Some victims were hacked to death with machetes, others were shot. Among the victims was an 11-year-old girl. On 14 January, after stopping a truck in Boyali and demanding the Muslims get off, anti-Balaka fighters killed six members of a family: three women and three small children, aged one, three, and five. On 18 January, at least 100 Muslims were killed in the town of Bossemptele. Two days later, anti-Balaka fighters killed four Muslim women who had hidden in a Christian family's house. On 29 September, Abdou Salam Zaiko, a Muslim from Bambari, was killed when the vehicle he was travelling in was attacked. According to witnesses, the anti-Balaka allowed the Christian driver and passengers to leave the vehicle, but killed Zaiko and other Muslim passengers. On 8 October, seven Muslim passengers in a car owned by Saidou Daouda were killed after the car was ambushed. On 14 October, in the Bangui neighbourhood of Nguingo, anti-Balaka members killed three civilians, seriously injured at least 20 more, and burned down 28 houses and a church. The attack was revenge for an earlier assault on some of their members by the local population following a previous attack by the armed group. Over 1,000 people fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)'s Equator province, while 100 took refuge at a Catholic Church compound. In September, Djimbété encampment for the Peulh ethnic group was attacked. Several people were killed including a six-year old boy.

Abuses committed by armed Peulh fighters

Armed Muslim Peulh fighters who were often allies of the Séléka conducted attacks killing and injuring mainly Christians, pillaging and burning villages and houses. In October, armed Muslim Peulh fighters allegedly carried out several attacks on villages around Bambari and in central and northern CAR. At least 30 people were killed.

Violations committed by African Union peacekeepers

Chadian national army (ANT) members and those of the Chadian contingent of MISCA were allegedly involved in serious human rights violations. In some instances MISCA forces failed to protect civilians, while in others members of its contingents allegedly committed serious human rights violations with impunity.

On 4 February, members of the ANT allegedly shot dead three people in the town of Boali, while they were repatriating Chadians and Muslims to Chad. On 18 February, Chadian troops were responsible for killing at least eight people including children, when they indiscriminately opened fire on a crowd in Damara and at the PK12 neighbourhood of Bangui. On 29 March, troops opened fire on a market crowd in Bangui killing and injuring several civilians. Following criticism from the international community, the Chadian authorities withdrew their 850 soldiers from MISCA in April. On 24 March MISCA's Congolese (Brazzaville) contingent were allegedly implicated in the enforced disappearance of at least 11 people, including four women, from the home of a local militia leader in Boali.

No MISCA peacekeepers had been investigated for human rights violations by the end of the year.

Prison conditions

The conditions and security at Bangui's Ngaragba prison remained of concern. On 3 November, 584 prisoners were registered, including 26 minors. The prison's capacity was 500 adults. In late November more than 650 inmates were held in cramped cells. There was a lack of adequate sanitation and protection against malaria. Prisoners defecated in plastic bags which they threw outside, jeopardizing their own health and that of people living nearby.

Anti-Balaka militia attacked the prison in January 2014 and killed at least four suspected Séléka members detained there. That led to the escape of all prisoners. CAR officials told Amnesty International that the anti-Balaka members who led the attack were well known to them. However, by the end of the year, no action had been taken to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On 24 November, a riot erupted at Ngaragba prison. Some prisoners, suspected of being anti-Balaka members, armed with at least three Kalashnikov rifles and hand grenades, attacked the prison guards and the UN contingent guarding the prison. According to witnesses, at least one UN peacekeeper and 13 inmates were wounded. The riot followed the death of a detainee allegedly for lack of medical treatment and harsh detention conditions. The detainees also demanded that their cases be heard in reasonable time, with some complaining of having been in detention for 10 months without trial.

Freedom of expression

The few journalists who remained operational were often victims of harassment and intimidation by armed groups and the transitional authorities. Several journalists were reportedly killed because of their work. No effective investigations were known to have been carried out into these incidents. On 29 April, two journalists were attacked in Bangui. Désiré Luc Sayenga, a *Démocrate* newspaper journalist, died after being knifed and shot by a group of young men. René Padou, who worked with the protestant church Radio La Voix de la Grâce, died after an armed group threw grenades and shot him. Both journalists had previously denounced crimes committed across the CAR.

Impunity

The transitional authorities and the UN failed to effectively investigate crimes under international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in CAR, therefore perpetuating the cycle of violence and fear. In July, Amnesty International published a dossier naming 20 individuals, including anti-Balaka and Séléka commanders, against whom it had credible evidence to suspect that they could be responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious human rights abuses committed since December 2013. In December the organization revealed that some of these men were allegedly implicated in interference with the administration of justice and further crimes under international law between September and October 2014.

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