

Central African Republic - Country of Concern

Published 12 March 2015

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In March 2013, a collection of non-state armed groups called Séléka ousted President Bozizé, taking control of the capital Bangui. Widespread violence towards civilians led self-appointed local militias (“anti-Balakas”) to fight back, eventually ousting Sélékas from power in December 2013. This was preceded and followed by widespread attacks on civilians, as well as vicious communal and criminal violence, and by massive population displacement. African Union troops (MISCA) and French troops (Sangaris) deployed in December in an attempt to stabilise the country.

The human rights situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) remained dismal throughout 2014, due to continued violent conflict and widespread abuses against civilians. Principal concerns were the recruitment and use of child soldiers, extrajudicial killings, incitement to ethnic hatred, sexual violence against women and children, deprivation of livelihood, forced displacement, and inter-faith violence. There has been complete impunity for these acts.

The increase in the number of inter-faith reprisal attacks, as noted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), resulted in large-scale exodus of Muslim communities to neighbouring countries and to the north of CAR. It had a huge impact on basic livelihoods, the wider economy, and the economy's ability to recover. Long-term poverty, the absence of functioning state institutions, and a breakdown of law and order increased insecurity and exacerbated religious tensions. The humanitarian situation in 2014 was dire, with violence hampering the operations of UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating in the CAR.

Catherine Samba-Panza was elected interim President by the CAR's National Transitional Council in January 2014. She appointed an interim government (reshuffled in August) which was generally felt to be inclusive.

In 2014, the UK worked with fellow members of the International Contact Group for CAR to bring an end to the violence, while at the same time highlighting what was happening and attempting to prevent further abuses. The UK provided diplomatic and financial support to MISCA and provided

logistical help for the deployment of French troops. On 17 March, the EU Foreign Affairs Council authorised the deployment of an EU-led mission (EUFOR CAR), which was mandated to secure the capital city of Bangui for an initial period of six months. The EUFOR CAR operation reached full operational capacity in June, and was extended for a further three months until March 2015. The UK provided logistical and financial support.

In April, the UK co-sponsored a UN Security Council resolution authorising the deployment of a UN Peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA). MINUSCA deployed in September and has a civilian and military dimension, with an initial focus on preventing human rights abuses, improving security, and promoting reconciliation. A senior FCO diplomat, Diane Corner, is currently the Mission's Deputy Special Representative. We supported and encouraged attempts by UN bodies to follow up on reports of human rights abuses. We worked with the UN to secure an arms embargo and an individual sanctions regime to deter human rights abuse.

July saw the leaders of the rebel groups signing the Brazzaville Agreement for the cessation of hostilities. Despite initial hopes, it did not lead to widespread improvement in the security situation or reconciliation. Fighting continued and crime increased. The rebel groups appear to have splintered into smaller groups which, coupled with increased general banditry, led to continued widespread insecurity. 2014 also saw an increase in the number of attacks against the humanitarian community.

Through its humanitarian aid, the Department for International Development (DFID), the third largest bilateral humanitarian donor to the CAR, supported vulnerable populations and mitigated the impact of forced displacement and deprivation of livelihoods.

The UK welcomed the request from the CAR government for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open a new investigation into serious crimes committed in the CAR since 1 August 2012. On 24 September, the ICC Prosecutor announced her decision to open a second investigation in the CAR with respect to crimes allegedly committed since 2012. On 26 September, at the UN Human Rights Council, the UK co-sponsored a resolution to extend the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in CAR for another year, in order to assess, verify, and report on human rights abuses and violations, and make recommendations on technical assistance and capacity building.

However, we recognise that these efforts had only limited impact on human rights in the CAR in the course of 2014. Obstacles included ongoing conflict, the poor infrastructure of the country, and the remoteness of many areas. These impeded the work of human rights monitors and the ability of state authorities to enforce respect for human rights.

Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment

Throughout 2014 there were many credible reports of torture by all sides in the conflict, including extrajudicial executions and the killing of injured civilians.

The deadly cycle of sectarian violence in central and eastern parts of the country continued. One such example took place in February, and saw attacks against civilians in the town of Sibut by armed Séléka commanders and fighters who had left their bases in Bangui. Civilians were tortured and killed around the town where the former rebels had been re-grouping.

Several mass graves were uncovered in Bangui, including one containing 15 bodies in January. In February a mass grave with at least 13 bodies was discovered under a petrol station in Bangui at a camp formerly occupied by Séléka rebels.

Lack of police facilities and the absence of a functioning judicial system meant that little effective action to halt these abuses and bring the perpetrators to justice was taken. Reports by human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International, found that those suspected of involvement in committing crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations were already suspected of committing such violations and abuses in the past. They appear to have so far escaped investigation, prosecution or punishment.

The International Contact Group for CAR met in November 2014 in Bangui. Members publicly called for an end to the sectarian violence, and reminded all armed actors that those responsible for human rights abuses should be held to account.

Conflict and Protection of Civilians

Civilians continued to suffer enormously in the conflict throughout 2014. There was widespread displacement, and loss of livelihood and means of sustenance, either through the evacuation and destruction of farmland, or the theft of livestock. There were also reports of pillaging and the destruction of property. Acts such as these led to some people dying of hunger and disease in the bush, and is likely to have long-term humanitarian consequences.

It is estimated that more than 2.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance at the end of 2014. The latest available figures from the UN High Commission for Refugees indicated that there are 438,538 internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 425,977 CAR refugees living in neighbouring countries.

The UN noted, in their Commission of Inquiry Report, that in early 2014 anti-Balaka groups attacked villages even after the Séléka were no longer present. The intentional targeting of Muslims took place throughout the western and central parts of the CAR. Hundreds of Muslims were killed, and hundreds of thousands were forcibly displaced.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

The UK was concerned that, despite ongoing reconciliation efforts, religious tensions remained high. There has been an exodus of Muslims to the north of the CAR, and the Muslim population in Bangui decreased from 120,000 to around 7,000.

The UK welcomed the work done by religious and nongovernmental organisations to reduce the tensions and promote social cohesion at community level. In June, the former FCO Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds, met the Bishop of Bossangoa, a member of the CAR's Inter-Religious Forum which advocates religious harmony in the CAR. The Bishop's key message was that the violence should not be seen as a fight between different religions, but rather as the legacy of neglect, poverty, and political exploitation.

Women's Rights

Women and children were particularly affected by the crisis in the CAR. The international community received numerous reports of rape, sexual slavery and early and forced marriage perpetrated by armed actors.

The UK calls for greater action in supporting the victims of sexual violence and bringing perpetrators to justice. Stronger efforts are required to address the precarious situation faced by women and girls in the IDP camps, and to highlight their needs and interests internationally.

At the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict in June, the then Foreign Secretary, William Hague, highlighted the situation in the CAR. In November, the African Union deployed a team of experts to the CAR to support victims of sexual violence, co-financed by the UK. This deployment is intended to facilitate the rehabilitation of three health facilities, provide protection and assistance to 1,000 victims of sexual violence, and establish a national network of government and community stakeholders that can help prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Children's Rights

More than one million children's lives were at risk in the CAR as aid organisations' access to vulnerable populations was severely impeded because of worsening security and criminality.

Concerns over the use of child soldiers continued. Séléka combatants and, more recently, anti-Balaka, actively recruited children and forced them to commit atrocities.

It is vital that the international peacekeeping forces in the CAR continue their efforts regarding the release of child soldiers from armed groups. The UK will continue to work through the UN to ensure efforts are made towards demobilisation and reunion with families.

This publication is part of the [2014 Human Rights and Democracy Report](#).