

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

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A WITNESS.

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HUMAN ISSUE 1 | SUMMER 2014

HUMAN

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**THIS IS NOT A
RELIGIOUS CONFLICT**
BY BABATUNDE OLUGBOJI

**PREVENTING
SLAUGHTER**
BY PHILIPPE BOLOPION

**AFRICA'S
PHOTO LEGEND:**
SAMUEL FOSSO

UNSEEN WAR INSIDE THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

UNSEEN WAR
INSIDE THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS WORLDWIDE

LAST LOOK

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people worldwide. We scrupulously investigate abuses, expose the facts widely, and pressure those with power to respect rights and secure justice. Human Rights Watch is an independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all.

INVESTIGATE > EXPOSE > CHANGE



Relatives search for the remains of those killed by the Iraqi military during the Anfal campaign, Arbil cemetery, Northern Iraq, 1991. © 1991 Susan Meiselas/Magnum Photos

BY ANDREW E. LEWIN

Susan Meiselas epitomizes the tradition of concerned photography for me. Her work has challenged, questioned, and redefined that tradition. She covers the present by uncovering the past.

In 1991, traveling alone at first, and then with a forensics team sponsored by Middle East Watch, Susan was the first photographer to document Saddam Hussein's genocidal campaign against the Kurds. The media were focused on the present in the aftermath of the Gulf War; Susan was interested in the past. Instead of photographing the Kurdish refugee camps, Susan was interested in the places the refugees had come from, their history, and the genocide of 1986-89. This image is one of a series of pictures with clothing on anonymous graves in the Arbil cemetery, the aftermath of a largely unknown and ignored conflict.

When I first saw the work, I was struck by the scale and scope of what happened in Kurdistan, as well as the poignancy of the clothing. It was very different from the photographs of mass graves that Susan had taken in Latin America, where mass graves typically had markers. The clothing represented a gesture of community. As soon as the uprising against Saddam was over, families dug up the bones searching for loved ones. If they found clothing around the bones, and it was not their relatives', they placed the clothing on the graves so the next person would not have to dig it up.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR WHY THIS MAGAZINE?

The information that Human Rights Watch gathers in the field, the evidence of human rights abuse, is only as powerful as its reach. That is why communications is a central part of our methodology for making change. We write reports, take videos and photographs, pen op-eds, distribute news releases, testify in parliaments, and tweet, post on Facebook, and feed YouTube. The results of our research missions become part of the national and international conversation – they cannot be ignored.

More than one million people follow Human Rights Watch on Twitter. We've reached more than 9 million views on our YouTube channel. Our websites attract more than 30,000 visitors every day – in 7 languages.

So why, in the midst of an epic and global revolution in communications, do we decide to publish a magazine?

We'll try to deploy the best of magazine journalism to take readers deep into the stories that inspire our mission. *Human* was not created to compete in the marketplace, so it isn't bound by the conventions most magazines must follow. (Funded entirely by a single donor, who describes his motivation on page 55, it also won't divert resources from Human Rights Watch's basic mission.) In this premier issue, we've focused on the staggering, horrifying, and often inspiring human drama taking place in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Rarely has a human rights crisis so enormous unfolded in a country so little known to the outside world. A handful of journalists and international aid workers have worked hard to bring to light the desperate facts of mass killing in CAR. But too many people still find the basic storyline elusive, obscure. Bad things are happening in a country you've barely heard of. Why does it matter?

We take it as self-evident that human rights abuse happening in one country is as worthy of international attention as in any other. *Human* will strive, above all, to remind readers that the rights and experiences of each individual are equally sacred, equally worthy, and can equally command our attention.

Human rights abuse flourishes in darkness and secrecy. Public exposure is rarely enough, on its own, to stop that abuse outright. But it is often the start.



Carroll Bogert,

Deputy Executive Director, External Relations

Left: People displaced by the fighting wait on the road to Lere for humanitarian aid to arrive.



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Contributors



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This issue made possible by a grant from the **Andrew and Marina Lewin Family Foundation**

Cover: A child soldier in the Seleka forces in Bossangoa.



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The archive of internationally renowned photographer Samuel Fosso was nearly destroyed by looters in the Central African Republic's capital. Vivienne Walt interviews the African legend in Paris.

#CARcrisis

Even before the current conflict began, the Central African Republic lagged behind the rest of Africa.

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

0.7 MILLION SQUARE KM

Data source: World Bank

Route of Human Rights Watch investigations

● Berbérati

● Nola

● Bouar

● Boyali

● Bossemptele

● Yaloke

● Bossembélé

● Boali

● Boda

● Mbaiki

● Bangui

● Sibut

● Bossangoa

● Bozoum

POPULATION GROWTH

2012
4.5 million

1980
2.3 million

HEALTH

DOCTORS PER 100,000 PEOPLE



PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT



AIDS IN ADULT POPULATION



MATERNAL MORTALITY (per 100,000 births)

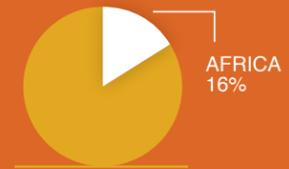


GDP PER CAPITA, 2012



THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

ROADS PAVED, 2010



COMMUNICATION

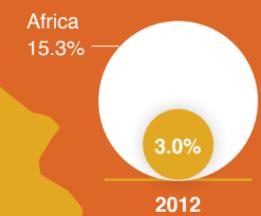
CELL PHONE SUBSCRIPTION



PHONE LINES



INTERNET



LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH

FRANCE
83 years

U.S.
79 years

WORLD AVERAGE
71 years

INDIA
66 years

YEMEN
63 years

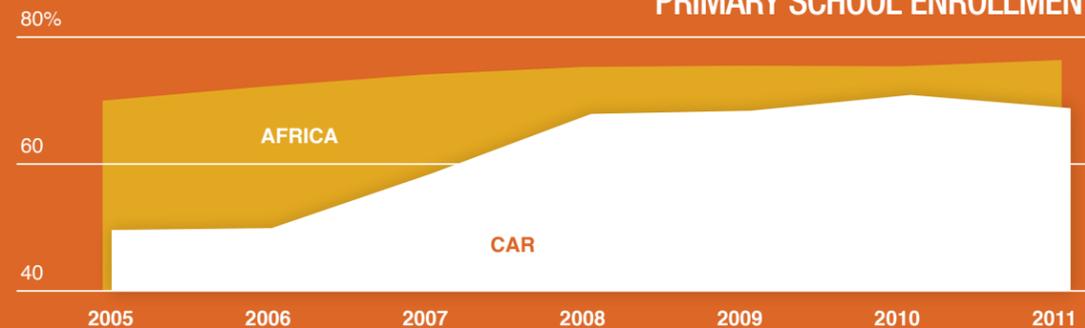
AFGHANISTAN
60 years

AFRICA
56 years

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
49 years

SIERRA LEONE
45 years

PRIMARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT



Political and military leadership in the Central African Republic is highly fluid. Both the Seleka and anti-balaka militias are greatly decentralized, with many individuals claiming to be “generals” and “leaders.” Some of the major characters in the conflict include:

SELEKA:

GENERAL ABDEL KARIM MOUSSA

Deputy army chief of staff of the Seleka; also served in national army under former President François Bozizé. Has remained in Bangui, the capital, with approximately 1,000 Seleka fighters in cantonment, protected by African Union (AU) forces.



GENERAL MAHAMAT BAHR

Head of military intelligence for the Seleka, and often sent to resolve internal crises. Helped bring former President Bozizé to power in 2003, but soon broke with Bozizé and was imprisoned. Currently located in eastern CAR, where he continues to coordinate Seleka activities.

NOUREDDINE ADAM

A key strongman in the Seleka's rise to power. Commander of the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace, a core Seleka group. During Seleka's 10-month rule, served as minister of public security and later as head of intelligence. Accused of using torture. Left CAR for Benin after interim President Michel Djotodia's resignation. Current whereabouts unknown.

FORMER AND TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT ACTORS:



MICHEL DJOTODIA

Seleka leader and interim president for 10 months of Seleka rule. Former head of Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, one of the main rebel groups in Seleka coalition. Officially disbanded the Seleka in September 2013, a move that in practice had no impact on its activities. Resigned under international pressure as interim president in January 2014 and is currently in exile in Benin.

GHISLAIN GRESENGUET

Newly named national prosecutor. His office should take the lead in investigating and arresting Seleka and anti-balaka accused of serious human rights violations, but it faces serious lack of capacity.



CATHERINE SAMBA-PANZA

Current transitional president, elected by the transitional council after Djotodia's resignation. Mayor of Bangui under Seleka rule, but regarded by many observers as neutral.

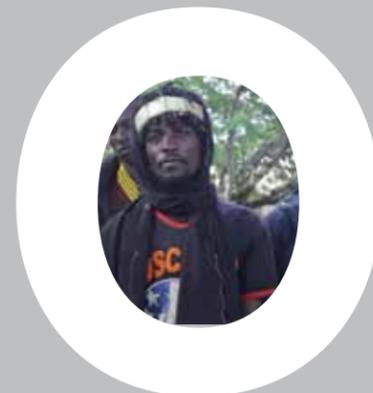
COLONEL DIEUDONNÉ ORANTI

A founder of the anti-balaka movement in Bossangoa. Admitted that he moved hundreds of well-armed anti-balaka toward Bangui in December 2013. Human Rights Watch documented Oranti's coordination of attacks on Muslim civilians in Bangui and Bossangoa.

ANTI-BALAKA:

DOUZE PUISSANCE

The most powerful anti-balaka leader of the strategic Bangui neighborhood Boy-Rabe, Douze Puissance (his *nom de guerre*) told Human Rights Watch in March 2014 that he controlled over 2,500 men. Many anti-balaka fighters in Bangui and in areas of the capital's periphery claim allegiance to him.



CAPTAIN AIME-JEREMY KOTTÉ

Commander of anti-balaka in Boda, southwestern CAR, where some 6,000 Muslims were surrounded by his forces in March and unable to obtain food.

INTERNATIONAL FIGURES:



FRANÇOIS HOLLANDE

French president and most engaged Western leader in the region. When the Seleka took over Bangui in March 2013, Hollande opted to maintain French forces in the capital to protect the airport. In December 2013, Hollande sent a larger French military intervention force, Operation Sangaris, to CAR to try and stop the bloodshed.



GENERAL FRANCISCO SORIANO

Head of French military operation, Sangaris, since December 5, 2013. Under his command, French forces have assisted in securing Bangui and have established bases tasked with civilian protection in the west. Sangaris presence and impact outside the main towns has been weaker.

MAJOR GENERAL MICHEL MOKOKO

Commander of African Union-led peacekeeping mission, MISCA. Native of Cameroon. Commands some 6,000 peacekeeping troops from eight African nations.

UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BOUBACAR GAYE

The UN's top man in CAR since March 2013. Has publicly urged the transitional government to take a more active role in addressing the anti-balaka. A Senegalese army general, Gaye will play a key role in incorporating the AU peacekeeping mission, MISCA, into the authorized UN force.



IDRISS DEBY

President of neighboring Chad, and a regional power broker. Effectively forced then-President Djotodia to resign in January 2014. Coordinated the evacuation of Chadian nationals and Muslim CAR citizens following widespread anti-balaka attacks. Withdrew Chadian peacekeeping troops in April following repeated criticism of their abusive conduct.

A HISTORY OF MISRULE

The Central African Republic won independence from France in 1960. Since then, the country has been led by five men (and now one woman); most were overthrown in coups. Nearly all these leaders silenced their political opponents, some more violently than others. International pressure resulted in the election of a civilian government in 1993 but, like previous governments, this one slid into misrule. In 2003, General François Bozizé, then the military chief of staff, backed by Arabic-speaking allies from Chad and residents of the country's northeast, overthrew the unpopular civilian government. Bozizé's ascension to power failed to bring stability. Rival rebel groups began fighting each other as well as the government.

ORIGINS OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT

A group of rebel factions calling itself “Seleka,” or “Alliance,” coalesced from among the anti-government militias. They were predominantly Muslim and based in the north. Changes stipulated under the peace deal – development aid for the north, the release of political prisoners, and justice for a northern leader who had been “disappeared” – had not materialized quickly enough for the rebels. Frustrated by the lack of change under Bozizé, roughly 5,000 Seleka rebels fought their way from northern Central African Republic to the capital, Bangui, seizing power in a coup on March 24, 2013.

HOW THE SELEKA FELL

Michel Djotodia, the Seleka leader who formally became president in August 2013, officially disbanded the Seleka in September, but its members continued to commit atrocities. During its rule, the Seleka indiscriminately killed civilians, engaged in rampant looting, and burned entire villages to the ground. Its allies include foreign mercenaries and warlords from neighboring Sudan and Chad. The presence of foreign Muslim fighters has exacerbated tensions with the Christian majority, interrupting a long history of harmony between the two groups.

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE ERUPTS

In September, mostly Christian local armed groups known as the anti-balaka began rising up against the Seleka. The anti-balaka – which translates as “anti-machete” – indiscriminately attacked and killed Muslim civilians, equating them with the Seleka. On December 5, the anti-balaka started an offensive on Bangui, displacing the Seleka from the capital. In January 2014, Djotodia resigned as interim president, and the National Transitional Council elected Catherine Samba-Panza, the mayor of Bangui, in his place. As of June 2014, the Seleka remain active only in isolated pockets of the country, and many urban and rural areas have been emptied of their Muslim residents.



Abbott Xavier saved hundreds of lives by offering shelter to local Muslims in his church in Bouali.

THIS IS **NOT** A RELIGIOUS **WAR**

What The Fight Is Really About

BY BABATUNDE OLUGBOJI

Fatimatu Yamsa, a Muslim woman, knew she was about to die. Anti-balaka militiamen, who are predominantly Christian and animist, stopped the truck that she and others were riding in, hoping to flee the violence in their villages.

It was January 14, at a checkpoint outside Boyali, a trading town roughly 80 miles north of Bangui. As the militiamen ordered all Muslims to descend from the truck, Fatimatu Yamsa desperately handed her 7-month-old baby to a Christian woman sitting next to her, and begged her to save the infant. The anti-balaka killed Fatimatu, as well as two other Muslims, and their four children, with machetes on the steps of a nearby mosque.

The Central African Republic is awash in stories like Fatimatu's. And the conflict is widely described, both by the country's own citizens and by the international media, as a war between Christians and Muslims.

In fact, the deeper roots of the conflict are the profound corruption and poor governance that has left the population desperate and angry. Meanwhile, the violence goes unpunished, allowing aspiring dictators to seize power through bloodshed, confident that they will escape justice for their crimes and be rewarded with the country's national resources.

The same dynamic is playing out in several African countries just below the Sahara, where Muslim and Christian communities have mingled for generations, even centuries.

In Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, and elsewhere, poverty and corruption are fuelling enormous frustration. When violence breaks out and governments fail to deliver justice, the result is more violence.

In Nigeria, too, the problem is more complex than just a Muslim-Christian standoff. The rise of Boko Haram mirrors the mistrust of local people toward their ineffectual and abusive government – and now, their rage at how the government has killed and abused civilians in its response to the crisis. And violence across Nigeria is on the rise. More than 3,000 people have been killed since 2010 across five states in the central part of the country. Competition between local farming communities and nomadic herdsman has plagued this region for many years, and is now spreading to other states in northern Nigeria. The government is not addressing either the root cause of the violence, or the violence itself. The authorities have so far not investigated the many incidents of killings and disappearances, nor brought anyone to justice for them. So on it goes.

Corruption and poverty are upside-down twins. The Central African Republic's intense poverty is misleading; the country



Above: The Imam Ishmail Nafi at a displaced persons camp in Bossangoa, praying for those killed the previous day during an anti-balaka attack on the town.
Below: Weapons confiscated from anti-balaka and Seleka fighters by African Union peacekeepers in Bossangoa.



is rich in diamonds, gold, timber, and many other natural and mineral resources. The population, however, hardly benefits from the assets. Most people live without electricity or even access to safe water and basic medical care. Wealth is reserved for a small political clique in the capital, Bangui, who drive fancy cars, wear tailor-made suits, and regularly travel to Paris to spend their wealth.

President François Bozizé — who himself was reportedly supported by France for many years of his rule — left power with an accumulated fortune of \$200 million, or \$20 million for every year he was in power. For years, vast regions outside Bangui went without any development funds, as infrastructure and institutions crumbled completely. When rebel movements in the northeast emerged, claiming to fight economic marginalization and lack of development, Bozizé unleashed the Presidential Guard against the population, burning down village after village in the mid-2000s. The peace accords eventually signed by the government and various rebel groups were never implemented. This injustice sparked the Seleka rebellion, which ultimately overthrew Bozizé.

Obviously there are important ethnic and religious forces at work in CAR. Many Seleka fighters, although they are CAR citizens, do not speak the national languages (Sango and French), preferring to converse in Arabic, which brands them as “foreigners” in the eyes of many. And indeed, some of them are foreigners — their ranks were reinforced by many Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries. And their victims were mostly non-Muslims.

CAR will not recover from the bloodshed without bringing the worst killers to justice.

Muslims in the Central African Republic occupy a position in society that makes them vulnerable to popular resentment and violence. They are mostly traders and businessmen, and nomadic Fulani or Peuhl cattle herders. The Muslim traders and businessmen dominate commerce in the country, from import and export businesses to the markets where most people shop, and the licit and illicit trade in diamonds and gold. Their wealth is often the subject of envy and resentment from the majority non-

Muslim population, who are frequently so poor that their possessions can fit inside a single plastic bag.

The Fulani or Peuhl, locally known as the Mbororo, are ethnically distinctive and live a traditional nomadic lifestyle, constantly moving, sometimes across borders, with their herds of cattle and livestock in search of grazing. They are in frequent conflict with the sedentary non-Muslim farmers, who resent incursions into their fields and the destruction caused by the cattle. These social tensions exploded in the aftermath of the Seleka coup.

Hundreds of thousands of people in the Central African Republic have lost their homes and are in urgent need of humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims, in particular, have fled the country, and returning them to their original homes will be a difficult, yet essential, task.

Meanwhile, the Central African Republic will not recover from this year of bloodshed and terror without bringing the worst killers to justice. The lone break in the Central African Republic’s culture of impunity has been an indictment and trial before the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Congo’s former vice president, Jean-Pierre Bemba-Gombo, is accused of rape, pillage, and murder as leader of the Liberation Movement of Congo, while fighting against Bozizé in 2002-2003.

It’s natural and important to focus on those who are doing the killing. But it’s also important to look at who is doing the protecting. Those who have done the most to save the lives of Muslims are Catholic and Protestant clergy, who have time and time again stepped into the violence and sheltered and fed Muslim communities in their churches and homes.

Pastor Koudougeret, a Baptist church leader who now takes care of Fatimatu’s baby, vigorously shook his head when asked if his country was in a religious war. “The ultimate cause of our instability is not religious but political, because whoever comes to power makes his entourage commit abuses to stay in power,” he explained. “They treat the country as their private money-making business. We need a real democracy with politicians who have a vision to look after ... everyone.” ■

-- with Peter Bouckaert in *Bojali*

JOURNEY INTO FEAR

BY PETER BOUCKAERT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARCUS BLEASDALE/VII

In November 2013, the photographer Marcus Bleasdale and I began a four-month-long journey to document the Central African Republic's descent into horrific bloodshed. We wanted to draw the world's attention to a massive crisis in a country that few people in the world even knew existed.

1 A COUNTRY ON THE RUN In the schoolrooms of the northern Central African Republic, the blackboards still show dates from late March 2013 — when Seleka rebels seized power in the country, and the nightmare began. Since then, the armed Seleka rebels, whose collective name means “alliance” in Sango, the national language, have ruled through fear — burning down village after village, firing randomly at civilians from their pick-up trucks, executing farmers in their fields, torturing anyone suspected of plotting against them, and murdering women and children. Their brutality continues to spread like a deadly cancer.



Anti-balaka fighters on the road to Boda.

In our 4x4 truck, loaded with fuel, food, camping gear, and everything else we need to survive in the devastated countryside, we travel down roads that have not seen a single vehicle pass by in months. People often mistake our vehicle for a Seleka military vehicle coming to attack them. They flee before us in terror. One day, our passage is blocked by the meager bundles of belongings dropped by a family that had fled into the bush as they heard us approach.

We find a toddler crying on the road: his parents had abandoned him as they ran. When they emerge a few minutes later, after much coaxing, they explain that they had been walking all night to reach Bossangoa, the regional capital, where some 40,000 people are living in dismal conditions around the Catholic Cathedral. "There are so many children dying from malaria and typhoid fever," the exhausted father tells us.

Two days later, it happens again. Our road is blocked by left-behind belongings, and as we step out of the car to clear the road, we hear the cries of a newborn nearby. We wade into the dense bush, and find a tiny one-month-old, who fell from his mother's back as she kept running. It takes us nearly half an hour to reassure her it is safe to come out. Such is the terror created by the Seleka, who shoot at every person they pass.

In the areas controlled by Seleka, we drive for hours through abandoned, burned villages without seeing a single soul. Goats and pigs wander through the empty villages, but their owners have fled deep into the bush to escape the Seleka killers. The devastation all around us leaves us stunned.

A school in Bossangoa being used as a shelter for people displaced by the fighting.



2 THE FIGHTERS

In Bossangoa, the capital of northern CAR, we finally encounter the heavily armed fighters of the mostly Muslim Seleka rebel movement, manning the checkpoint at the entry to the city. Warily, we stare at each other. Communication is difficult: most of the Seleka fighters don't speak French or the national Sango, preferring to communicate in their native Arabic, the language of the extreme northeast of the country, and of Chad and Sudan, home to many of the foreign fighters who joined the Seleka ranks.

Many of these men have been fighting in various rebellions since they were first hired by Francois Bozizé in 2002 to bring him to power. As president, Bozizé failed to integrate them into his army and exacerbated the discrimination Muslims had historically faced in the predominantly Christian country. So the men went back to the bush to fight again.

They have already suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the mysterious anti-balaka militias that have sprung up to oppose them, and rumors of large-scale massacres against Muslims at the hands of the anti-balaka in the remote countryside are circulating. They are losing their air of invincibility.

A few days later, we set off to seek out the anti-balaka militia. They move on foot, covering huge distances to carry out their attacks, and care little about road conditions. To protect their bases from Seleka attacks, they break down the bridges and litter the roads with cut-down trees, blocking the Seleka from coming in their feared 4x4 vehicles.

Ten kilometers out of Bossangoa on the road to the trading center of Ouham-Bac, we face a seemingly insurmountable obstacle: a bridge has been destroyed, leaving only two metal beams across the deep river. As we despair, groups of young men emerge from the bush, wearing the distinctive gris-gris amulets of the anti-balaka, who believe the amulets protect them from being harmed by bullets. We explain the purpose of our visit, and they agree to open the bridge for us, jumping down to the riverbanks and retrieving the heavy teakwood beams that form the surface of the bridge, repairing it in just half-an-hour. We drive over the rickety bridge in our heavily loaded 4x4, knowing that the slightest deviation can plunge us into the river below.



Seleka fighters at a checkpoint on the road out of Bossangoa. They regularly rob local residents who have to cross the checkpoint after searching for food in the countryside.

Down the road from the just-repaired bridge, we enter the heartland of the anti-balaka militia. Everywhere are men and boys, and even women, wearing their gris-gris amulets and armed with machetes, spears, and homemade hunting guns. They may not have the heavy weapons of the Seleka, but their sheer prevalence in the countryside makes it a deadly no-go zone for Muslims, who are nowhere to be seen.

Despite their swagger and dead-man stares, the Seleka fighters and their commanders are nervous.

At the town of Wikamo, hundreds of heavily armed anti-balaka fighters emerge from the burned-out homes to hold an impromptu meeting with us. All around us are armed anti-balaka fighters, some of them kids as young as 12, shorter than their homemade rifles.

Eric Zalo, the secretary of the anti-balaka in the village, explains that he has more than 200 armed fighters in Wikamo alone, and that they formed the anti-balaka movement in response to the atrocities being committed by the mostly Muslim Seleka fighters:

"The anti-balaka are exclusively Christian, and our aim is to liberate the Christian population from the yoke of the Muslims. We are not a rebel group. We only fight against the Seleka and protect the population."

Zalo denies his men attack Muslim civilians, but we know he is lying. Just the day before, we met a Muslim woman whose unarmed son had been killed in this exact village a few weeks earlier.

My colleague Lewis Mudge conducted investigations in the Central African Republic during the months when violence against Christians was rampant. Neither side is blameless in this war. But we meet too many civilians who have been senselessly attacked for belonging to the wrong religion.



People displaced by the fighting between Seleka and anti-balaka forces take shelter in an old factory on the grounds of the Catholic church in Bossangoa.



A displaced woman and her child take shelter from the insecurity in the villages surrounding Bossangoa after anti-balaka forces killed her husband and 13-year-old son.

3 THE DISPLACED

At the Catholic Church in Bossangoa, displaced people are everywhere, a camp so dense that it is difficult even to walk around among all of the crowded misery. Some 40,000 people have fled their homes following Seleka attacks and sought out the protection of the Catholic Church. The air is filled with smoke, pungent odors, dust, and noise. In tiny little tents fit for maybe two adults, entire families are cramped, trying to squeeze between their meager belongings. Many sleep in the open.

In tent after tent, we find stories of death and horror. Leonie Danta, 20, nursing a newborn, tells me that four Seleka fighters took her husband, Jean-Baptiste, 37, from their home in Bossangoa. She had seen him alive at the Seleka base in town and had begged for his release, but the Seleka executed him that night, his body thrown in the river and never found. I pause when she tells me she has six children. "Wait a minute, how old were you when the first was born?" I ask. When she was only 10, she says in a whisper, explaining that she had been playing outside with her friends

when a man came, grabbed her arm, and dragged her away to be raped. She became pregnant, and her parents forced the rapist to marry her. I leave wondering how she really felt about the death of the man who had greatly terrorized her.

The people here are literally trapped: stepping just a few meters from the safety of the camp can mean death. When farmers try to make a furtive visit to their fields, Seleka fighters often lie in ambush, waiting to kill them. One day, a little boy comes running toward us, crying that the Seleka has just executed his uncle. As we go to investigate, we find out that the uncle had managed to escape alive, but only just. He had gone to the Muslim side of town to look for a stray pig. A displaced Muslim woman started yelling that his parents were anti-balaka fighters and urged the nearby Seleka to execute him. Nonchalantly, and within view of a horrified international TV crew, the Seleka men began beating the man mercilessly with their gun butts, then took out a large knife to slaughter him. At the last moment, he managed to escape, dodging the bullets they fired at him.



Women in a stream near the trading center of Ndjo that displaced residents cross daily to reach their shelters in the bush. Most of the town's 14,000 residents fled to these remote areas.

4 LIFE IN THE BUSH

Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes and hide deep in the bush, where many are dying from disease, bad water, and malnutrition. In the Ouham province surrounding Bossangoa, the country's worst-affected area, at least 170,000 people have fled their homes.

At the large but deserted gold-trading town of Ndjo, we ask the few local villagers we can find if they can take us to their hiding places in the bush. They look at us skeptically, wondering if we are up for the 4 kilometer march along narrow tracks and through a waist-deep river. They ask us to hide our car deep in the bush so it won't be seen by passing-by Seleka fighters.

At the first lean-to shelter, we find the dignified village chief of Ndjo, 55-year-old Rafael Newane, whose face is lined with sadness. He shows us the graves of two of his grandchildren, Frediane Mobene, 9 months, and Orelé Newane, 6 months, who had died just the week before,

three days apart, from untreated malaria. They make small mounds in the reddish dirt.

At the next shelter down the path, we find Placide Yamingi, Ndjo's medical officer, who had buried his sister, dead from malaria, just 48 hours before. He tells us that there are four or five deaths every week among the displaced from the village. Despite his medical training as a nurse, he is unable to help most of the sick and dying: Seleka fighters looted Ndjo's hospital and its pharmacy on September 16, leaving Yamingi without medications. He shows us the tiny medical kit he managed to save, which contains a single bandage and a few surgical tools. "We live and die here like animals," he adds, barely able to contain his anger.

We leave behind all of the medications and first aid kits we have with us and return a few weeks later with a humble contribution of malaria medicines. Yamingi tells us that our colleagues from Médecins sans Frontières had begun a mobile clinic in Ndjo once a week, one of the few signs of a humanitarian response amid all the suffering.

5 THE PEACE KEEPERS

In early December, France decides to intervene militarily to stop the

bloodshed in its former colony, deploying more than 1,000 soldiers on a mission called Operation Sangaris, after a local species of butterfly. Suddenly, French warplanes are flying low and loud over Bossangoa and Bangui, sending a powerful message to the warlords that things are about to change.

But the arrival of the Sangaris soldiers, in their tanks and armored vehicles, coincides with the outbreak of an even more deadly cycle of violence, as the anti-balaka militia seize the moment to launch a surprise offensive on the Seleka. Within just a few days, an estimated 1,000 people are killed in Bangui alone, as both the anti-balaka and the Seleka go house-to-house in tit-for-tat murder sprees.

The newly arrived French soldiers seemed stunned by the violence, having planned to disarm the Seleka militia, rather than to step into an escalating communal conflict. They have carefully studied the Seleka militia, but seem to know little about the mysterious anti-balaka, and are at a loss for how to confront them.

By early January, the violence in Bangui and the rest of the country spins even more out of control, as the Seleka starts fleeing its positions and regrouping in the East, leaving the Muslim civilian population to face the wrath of the anti-balaka and a furious Christian population.

Almost every day, Muslims are lynched in the streets of Bangui, their bodies cut to pieces. Entire towns and neighborhoods are emptied of their Muslim populations. In the face of stupefying violence, the French Sangaris seem indecisive. They are clearly outnumbered and outmatched, and seem unclear on their mandate.

The African Union peacekeeping mission is more complex. Known as MISCA, the French acronym for the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic, the mission consists of 6,000 troops from eight African nations.

Some of the peacekeepers—particularly those from Rwanda and Burundi—seem to genuinely understand



Peacekeepers confiscate machetes as residents displaced by fighting enter an international compound for safety.

Within just a few days, an estimated 1,000 people are killed in Bangui alone...the newly arrived French soldiers seem stunned by the violence.

the gravity of what is going on, and intervene time and time again to try to stop the killings. For many Rwandan soldiers, what they see and experience in CAR is deeply personal, reminding them of what happened in Rwanda 20 years ago, during the 1994 genocide. The situation in CAR is different, but the levels of hatred and communal violence bring back dark memories.

But among the MISCA troops are also Chadian soldiers, who frequently side with the mainly Muslim Seleka rebels. In January, we witness a large Chadian MISCA convoy heading north from Bangui, and spot some of the Seleka's most senior generals being evacuated in the convoy. Soon we start documenting a new wave of killings, village burnings, and torture being committed by the regrouped Seleka.

6 CONFRONTING THE SELEKA

Colonel Saleh Zabadi, the commander of the Seleka forces in Bossangoa, is widely feared for his ruthlessness. Just a few days before our meeting, I sit down with three men who had barely survived an encounter with the Colonel. Seleka fighters captured seven Christian men as they were returning from selling produce at a market outside Bossangoa. Tied up and beaten, the men were brought before Colonel Zabadi and his commander, General Issa Yahya.

With barely a second thought, Colonel Zabadi accepted his men's accusation that the tied-up traders were enemy fighters. "Go throw them in the river," he said, ordering the men drowned. Four died. The three who survived told us their story. Now, Colonel Zabadi is sitting next to me, and we are about to confront him and his fellow Seleka commanders with the evidence we had collected of their crimes.

A higher-ranking officer, General Mahamat Bahr, head of Seleka's military intelligence, arrived in Bossangoa the night before, surviving several anti-balaka ambushes on the road. He joins us. In a lucky break, he remembers me from a visit to his rebel camp in 2007, and reassures his fellow Seleka fighters: "I know these guys care about Muslims; they even came all the way to visit us in 2007."

General Bahr, Colonel Zabadi, and his men listen attentively for half-an-hour as I explain, through an Arabic interpreter, our research on the widespread attacks against Muslims.

Peter Bouckaert (center) meets Seleka Col. Saleh Zabadani (far left) and Gen. Mahamat Bahar (second from the left) in Bossangoa.



They nod in appreciation. But then it comes time to discuss the numerous atrocities committed by the heavily armed Seleka men sitting all around us.

I tell them what a Christian farmer had told me just the day before: "Every day, the Seleka murder farmers going to their fields. They hunt us like animals, hiding in the bush to ambush us. Just yesterday, they shot dead a mother by the river, and they left her body with her baby crying next to her."

I tell Colonel Zabadi we know about the drowning of the traders: "I know it was you who gave the orders, because some of the men survived."

I tell the men this evidence could be used against them at the International Criminal Court

The whole group seems to tense up. General Bahr takes out a towel to wipe the sweat pouring off his face. I open my backpack and unfold a dozen large printouts generated by satellite imagery, villages Seleka had burned to the ground around Bossangoa. I have printed them out on a brief trip from CAR back to Geneva, my home. I tell them, "All those red dots are the houses you burned. More than 400 in Ben Zambé. More than 300 in Zéré. Not one home left in this village, the same in this one." I tell the men this was direct evidence that could be used against them in the International Criminal Court.

There is silence all around us. Cornered, Colonel Zabadi doesn't deny our accusations. The next day, we return unannounced to the Seleka base, and find General Bahr and Colonel Saleh in a heated discussion with other Seleka commanders about "human rights." At the end of the meeting, General Bahr orders the fighters to respect the orders from the French peacekeepers who had just arrived in Bossangoa to stay in their barracks, hand in their weapons, and ask permission before going anywhere. He ends by saying, "This is our last chance."

Incredibly, under the watchful eye of the nearby French and African peacekeepers, the Seleka men stick to orders to remain in their bases. Overnight, in this one town, the terror of the Seleka has noticeably diminished. In much of the rest of the country, the killings continue.



Residents of Bossangoa sheltering from gunfire in a peacekeepers' compound during anti-balaka attacks.

7 CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

We wake up on December 5 in Bossangoa to troubling news. The anti-balaka militia has launched a massive offensive in the capital, Bangui, and heavy clashes are taking place all over the capital, which will ultimately claim more than 1,000 lives in just a few days. Our driver and translator are clearly worried about their relatives in Bangui. News soon follows that General Yaya has been killed in the fighting in Bangui, adding to the tension.

At the house of Bossangoa's Imam, we find Oumar Abacar, a young Peuhl cattle herder with a badly infected gunshot wound to the knee from an anti-balaka attack. We take him to the hospital for treatment. As we return him to the Imam's house just after noon, heavily armed Seleka fighters arrive, and we find ourselves in the midst of a gun battle, when anti-balaka fighters enter Bossangoa.

The battle for Bossangoa has begun. Together with hundreds of local civilians, we rush for the relative

safety of the African peacekeepers' base, gunshots and explosions all around us. For hours, the battle rages. As the fighting intensifies, one peacekeeping commander distinguishes himself by his concern for civilian life: Captain Wilson of the Republic of Congo rallies his troops with remarkable speed and courage, deploying them around town to safeguard the tens of thousands of displaced people at the Catholic Church, as well as the Muslim population in the Boro neighborhood of Bossangoa, who are at risk of reprisal attacks by the anti-balaka militia.

The next morning, we return to Boro neighborhood, and find a community displaced and in mourning. Overnight, at least 7,000 Muslims have fled their homes and are now sheltering in the heavily protected Ecole Liberté, Bossangoa's town school.

The Imam is busy saying prayers for the dead, and men we have known for months now sit around him sobbing. Speaking in whispers, one of them gives us terrible news: Oumar Abacar, the Peuhl herder, has been killed. With his badly wounded knee, he stood no chance of escaping.



Anti-balaka fighters recruited and armed children in villages surrounding Bossangoa.



A child soldier in the Seleka forces in Bossangoa.

8 CHILDREN OF WAR

French forces arrive in Bossangoa after this terrible battle, and the mood in town grows even more tense. We pay another visit to the Seleka base where General Bahr is in command. I notice a young boy, no older than 12, standing amid the assembled troops. He quickly looks away, trying to avoid my attention.

Child soldiers are common among the Seleka, and they often turn hostile when asked their ages. They know they are not supposed to be there. "I'm 43," declared one Seleka fighter who was obviously under 15. His automatic rifle made it clear that he wouldn't entertain any follow-up questions. Even more children seem to have been mobilized to join the ranks of the anti-balaka. Entire villages, including kids as young as 11, have been armed. In one village, we find groups of young boys with machetes and hunting rifles, and one tiny boy wearing a UNICEF T-shirt and carrying a gun.

At the Seleka base, we bring the young boy we found within the ranks of the assembled Seleka fighters over to General Bahr and his commanders, who are having tea, and remind them that it is a crime to use child soldiers.

Colonel Zabadi, the Bossangoa commander, jumps up and twists the boy's elbow behind his head. He is trying to prove that the lack of flexibility in the boy's joints proves he is old enough to fight. It's a curious and highly unscientific test, and anyway the boy fails it.

"OK, he is very little, but he lost his whole family, they were all killed by the anti-balaka, and he wants to be with us," General Bahr argues. "He doesn't have anyone left to look after him." The boy confirms that the anti-balaka had attacked his family's cattle camp a few weeks before and killed his father, mother, and siblings, as well as most of his extended family. He is tiny and young, but life among these hardened men clearly feels to him like his only option.

After a long discussion, the Seleka fighters finally agree to release the boy into the custody of Bossangoa's Imam, so he can live among civilians. It is not only the many kids with guns that worry us. At the scenes of the most brutal lynchings in Bangui, we often found small children among the spectators, watching human beings being cut apart. What effect will these images have on them? They will surely grow up with scars.

9 BANGUI'S INFERNO

The death records of the Bangui morgue read like a chapter out of Dante's *Inferno*, page after page of people killed by machetes, torture, lynching, shooting, explosions, and burning. The overwhelming stench of the dead makes it impossible to remain for long. If unclaimed by relatives, the bodies are generally buried in mass graves.

With the forced resignation of President Michel Djotodia, on January 10, Seleka forces in Bangui are melting away, leaving the country's Muslims to face the fury of the virulently anti-Muslim anti-balaka fighters.

During three weeks in Bangui in January 2014, we witness a dozen lynchings and attempted lynchings of Muslims. One evening, we find a man running for his life from a lynch mob, and put our vehicle between him and the mob until we can run together into the safety of a Rwandan peacekeeping base. On many other occasions, we can do little more than witness and document the horror of bodies literally being ripped apart by the mob.

Children are watching, and many people are recording the mutilation on their cellphones.

One day on the road to the airport, we find a mob that has just lynched two Muslim traders. The anti-balaka fighters are busy mutilating the bodies, as French troops stand by 50 meters away.

Children are watching the scene, and many people are recording the mutilation on their cellphones. When we back away in horror, worried about our own safety, the killers laugh and try to reassure us. "You can stay and keep filming - We are not yet done," they boast. We walk away, not wanting to encourage such barbarity with our presence.

The commander of the French peacekeepers, General Soriano, calls me a few hours later, upset that I had criticized his men on Twitter for doing nothing while bodies were being mutilated. "We're busy enough protecting the living, and they were dead already,"

he argues. But the Geneva Conventions declare the desecration of a corpse a war crime, and General Soriano assures me at the end of our discussion that his troops will act differently next time.

We don't have to wait long. Just a few days later, the new interim president, Catherine Samba-Panza, proudly addresses a national army ceremony meant to re-launch the army, telling the assembled uniformed soldiers how proud she is to see them back on duty.

Most had fled and deserted during the time of the Seleka, when they were killed on sight. Just after the interim president leaves the ceremony, a large mob of uniformed soldiers brutally lynches a suspected Seleka fighter in their midst, cutting his body to pieces and burning it on the street in front of the gathered dignitaries and media.

The French peacekeepers arrive, and as promised by General Soriano, deploy to guard the now-burning corpse. In a surreal moment, a young man walks up to the French soldiers, holding the severed leg of the lynching victim. The young French soldiers gasp in horror. Not knowing what else to do, they order the man to put down the leg and leave. There isn't a single functioning prison now in the entire country, so it is impossible for them even to arrest the leg-wielding man.

Crowds of people, including children, film and photograph the burning body of a man lynched by uniformed soldiers in Bangui.



10 NEIGHBORHOOD DESTROYED

Not just people, but entire neighborhoods

die in the Central African Republic's conflict. In late January, we find ourselves in the midst of an orgy of looting and destruction at PK13, a Muslim neighborhood on the outskirts of Bangui. As we drive by, we notice Rwandan peacekeepers at the roadside, and stop to find out what is happening. We meet a group of 36 Muslims being protected by the Rwandans, the last remnants of a once thriving neighborhood. "The anti-balaka came and attacked this morning, with automatic weapons and grenades," one tells us, "They wanted to kill us all, and now they are destroying our homes."

We walk into surreal scenes of looting and destruction, as thousands of non-Muslims descend on the emptied neighborhood to carry away whatever they can. Looters are everywhere—anti-balaka men armed with machetes, but also women and even small children. Fires are burning all around us, as the looters torch what they cannot carry away, filling the neighborhood with acrid smoke. The noise is deafening, as hundreds of hammers slam down to remove metal roofs, doors, and windows from the Muslim homes. The mood is almost jovial, intoxicated, as the crowds encourage each other. "Loot! Loot! Today is our turn to loot!" they shout. "We will take our revenge!" another young man shouts at us as he carts away handfuls of stolen goods.

Before our eyes, a crowd of machete-wielding fighters is destroying the main mosque. Suddenly, the mood turns menacing, as they surround us and vent their anger. Waving their machetes, they shout at us: "We do not want any more Muslims in our country. We will finish them all off, this country belongs to the Christians!"

The outnumbered African peacekeepers try to stop the looting, firing in the air to disperse the looters, who return to continue looting just minutes later. The peacekeepers set up a few checkpoints to confiscate looted goods and weapons, but their efforts are as futile as trying to hold water in a sieve: the looters just outmaneuver them, overwhelming the peacekeepers with their sheer numbers.

As night falls, the 36 Muslims, mostly women and children, are still stuck, but protected by the Rwandan peacekeepers.



Muslim families trapped by violence in the PK13 neighborhood near Bangui prepare to flee their homes.

The anti-balaka fighters just across the road tell me, "If you don't get them out of here, we will kill them this night."

We go a kilometer down the road, trying to convince the better-equipped French peacekeepers to come evacuate the trapped Muslims. The French soldiers are skeptical, saying, "We don't want to be perceived as choosing sides here." I threaten to make a stink if they leave the Muslims

to their fate. They reluctantly call their commander and get the order to go rescue the last Muslims from PK 13.

Back in the PK13 neighborhood, there's a desperate scramble to take a few remaining possessions on the French military trucks, with only a few minutes to load up. These Muslims will survive tonight, but we all know that the neighborhood we are taking them to is also likely to be attacked.

When we return to the PK13 neighborhood a few days later, it is dead. All the houses are stripped down, with only the walls remaining. There is a dreadful silence. And all of a sudden, we are surprised by an anti-balaka fighter who walks by and cocks his AK-47, looking to attack Muslims in the next neighborhood. Amid the destruction, I think about all of the lives lived here, the neighborly relations torn apart forever, and realize that neighborhoods too can die.



Local Christians loot and burn homes in the Muslim neighborhood of PK13, on the outskirts of Bangui.

11 REAL-TIME REPORTING

The most difficult challenge we face in the Central African Republic

is not the daily hardship of working in a war-ravaged country. We are used to the rough roads and camping wild, scraping together a meal when we need it. The horrific violence and suffering we see every day is soul-destroying, but even that isn't the hardest part of the job. The most difficult thing is trying to get the world to care about what is happening in a place they have never heard of, and to mobilize them to act to stop the killings.

Most of the world's media – with a few notable exceptions – are nowhere to be found amid the carnage, so we try to get the word out ourselves. We decide to live-tweet the war.

It takes a suitcase full of electronics to tweet from a conflict zone without electricity or mobile phone networks: we need generators, battery chargers, satellite phones and satellite internet access to share a constant stream of photos capturing the dramatic events unfolding before our eyes. Every morning, we rise at 4 a.m. to post dozens of tweets and images from the previous day's events, taking advantage of a faster internet connection while everyone else is still asleep, before setting out on another day of research. Marcus Bleasdale's images garner a big following on Instagram. We both tweet like mad.

Soon, virtually every policymaker, humanitarian, and journalist interested in the crisis is following us, as well as thousands of ordinary people inside and outside the country who want to help make a difference. My phone is ringing off the hook, as journalists seek more information about the latest killings, and diplomats ask for detailed briefings.

The haiku-like tweets are powerful, sometimes irking international officials when I complain they need to do more. We have another powerful analytical tool in our arsenal, our eyes in the sky. Using commercially available satellite imagery, we begin mapping out the massive destruction caused by the fighting, showing towns and villages completely devastated by Seleka and anti-balaka arson attacks. In a country the size of France with ravaged roads, our satellite imagery analysis allows us to assess what is happening in places we have not yet reached, and to provide a powerful illustration of the places we have visited. A satellite image, like any picture, can speak 1,000 words.



We try to get the word out ourselves. We decide to live-tweet the war.

12 THE HEROES

It is difficult to find rays of hope amid all of the killing and suffering. Hate often rules the streets, and bystanders seem to rejoice in the violence, looting, and ultimate humiliation of their former neighbors. Acts of kindness and humanity are few and far between, which is why the individuals we meet who dare to stand up to the brutal violence seem all the more extraordinary.

Father Jean-Xavier Fagba, the Catholic priest in Boali, 80 kilometers north of Bangui, did not have second thoughts when the anti-balaka came into his town in January and began attacking its Muslim population. He strode into the violence, and personally led the threatened Muslims to the relative safety of his church, placing them under his protection. They remained there for six weeks, until a convoy of commercial trucks evacuated them to Cameroon in March.

One Sunday in January, we stop at the Boali church to listen to Father Fagba's Sunday service. The Muslims are waiting outside the church as his congregation celebrates Mass. Although he is regularly threatened by the anti-balaka, Father Fagba's sermon is uncompromisingly tough. "Being a Christian is not just about being baptized into our church," he preaches, "It is about following the example of Jesus, who taught us love and reconciliation. Do you think Jesus would have killed his neighbor?"

Then it is time for the parishioners to exchange handshakes. Instead of asking his congregation to shake the hand of the person sitting next to them, Father Fagba leads them outside, and blesses the displaced Muslims gathered outside, extending his handshake of peace to them. In town after town we visit, the courageous Catholic priests and nuns often seem to be the only force able to protect vulnerable Muslim communities. In Bossemptele, 297 km northwest of Bangui, hundreds of Muslims are gathered at the Catholic Mission, whose hospital is filled with the wounded from the fighting, both Christian and Muslim. At the hospital, we meet 12-year-old Mamadou Oumarou, whom the anti-balaka tried to kill with their machetes. His right arm is missing from a machete blow.

Father Bernard Kinvi, the Togolese priest who administers the hospital, spent days looking for Muslim survivors after more than 80 were killed by the anti-balaka in late January. Many days after the massacre, he still found survivors hiding in fear. Five days after the attack, he discovered Lyasa, a



Father Bernard Kinre, a Catholic priest, embraces Lyasa, 12, a polio survivor. Father Kinre spent days looking for Muslim survivors after a massacre in Bossemptele.
© 2014 Peter Bouckaert/Human Rights Watch

12-year-old polio survivor, abandoned by a nearby river. "He tried to run away from me when we found him," Kinvi recounts, "He thought I was the anti-balaka who came to kill him."

Father Kinvi seems unfazed by the tremendous burden of care placed upon him and his fellow priests and nuns, and shrugs off threats he's received from the anti-balaka. He is full of smiles and reassuring hugs for the vulnerable Muslims. When asked where he finds the energy and courage, he responds: "All my religious life, I have waited for the moment where my faith would be tested, to see the strength of our faith. That moment has come, and it is a blessing."

Not only the religious stand up for humanity in the midst of the crisis. Although the humanitarian response from the United Nations is feeble at best, the medical teams of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and the courageous local staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross are everywhere we go, treating the wounded and the sick, and burying the dead with the respect they deserve. One day in December, at the height of the bloodshed around Bossangoa, we travel for hours along absolutely deserted roads, only to run into hundreds of people gathered, patiently waiting for the arrival of MSF's weekly mobile medical clinic.

In January, we arrive at the village of Boyali, 120 kilometers north of Bangui, as the local Red Cross volunteers are busy burying the bodies from several rounds of killings. Dressed in heavy rubber gloves and face masks, they face the unenviable task of locating and burying the decomposing bodies of the victims of the communal violence, doing their volunteer work with dignity and humanity.



Muslims flee Bangui aided by Chadian special forces.

André Ngaisenne, the local president of the Red Cross, himself disabled from a childhood illness, leads us around Boyali with a heavy limp, patiently showing us where they had found and buried the various victims, referring to the careful notes he had taken in his notebook to recount the details of lives lost: here is a Christian preacher who had been decapitated by the Seleka rebels; there in front of the mosque are the bloody outlines where three women and two children were hacked to death by the anti-balaka. As we walk around with this courageous man, we can see his fellow villagers bow their heads in shame, fully aware of what he is sharing with us.

13 THE EXODUS

Halima, a 25-year-old Muslim woman, cannot hold back tears. We are meeting for the second time, in the town of Bossemptele, about 298 kilometers northwest of Bangui.

When we first met two days earlier, Halima had told me how her husband and father-in-law were among the victims of a massacre in January, and that she had not heard from her three young children since they had run away from the killers. She didn't know if they were alive or dead. At that first meeting, there were still 270 Muslims in Bossemptele, all living at the Catholic Church. Forty-eight hours later, only 80 Muslims remained at the church—and they were the weakest, almost all women, children, and people with disabilities.

In the interim, a convoy of commercial trucks protected by African peacekeepers had come through town. Those strong enough took their chances, scrambling on to the trucks with the few possessions they had managed to save. In the chaos, parents abandoned children with disabilities, and some men left behind their wives and children.

For paper-thin Halima, who had stopped eating, dying seemed to be the only option left. "There is no-one to help me," she said, crying, while the local Catholic priest tried to comfort her, "I did not have the strength to climb onto the trucks, and no one helped me. I kept calling after them to take me, but they left without me."

I did not have the strength to climb onto the trucks, and no one helped me. I kept calling after them to take me, but they left without me.



Halima (center) lives under the protection of the Catholic Church after the anti-balaka militia slaughtered more than 80 Muslims in Bossemptele, including her husband and father-in-law. She was separated from her three children. © 2014 Peter Bouckaert/Human Rights Watch

Everywhere we travel in March, down Central African Republic's terribly degraded roads, we find a horrible emptiness, Muslim communities wiped off the map by the anti-balaka. In Bekadilli, we find the mosque gutted and hundreds of Muslim homes destroyed, and stumble upon human remains just outside the mosque. The remaining non-Muslim villagers look away in shame, knowing what horrors had occurred. Baoro was once home to at least

4,000 Muslims who were a majority in the town, displaying their wealth by constructing more than a dozen mosques. Now not a single one remains.

The anti-Muslim violence is unrelenting. In Bossemptele, we receive the news that the last remaining Muslim in Mbaiki, Saleh Dido, was murdered, his throat slit as he tried to flee to the police station. Three weeks earlier,

Samba-Panza and the French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, had visited the major southwestern city of Mbaiki and declared it a "symbol of living together and reconciliation." Four months into our journey, we are face-to-face with an unprecedented exodus of much of the country's Muslim population, the culmination of a year of terror and suffering. There is not yet any sign of living together or reconciliation ■

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH

CAMEROON

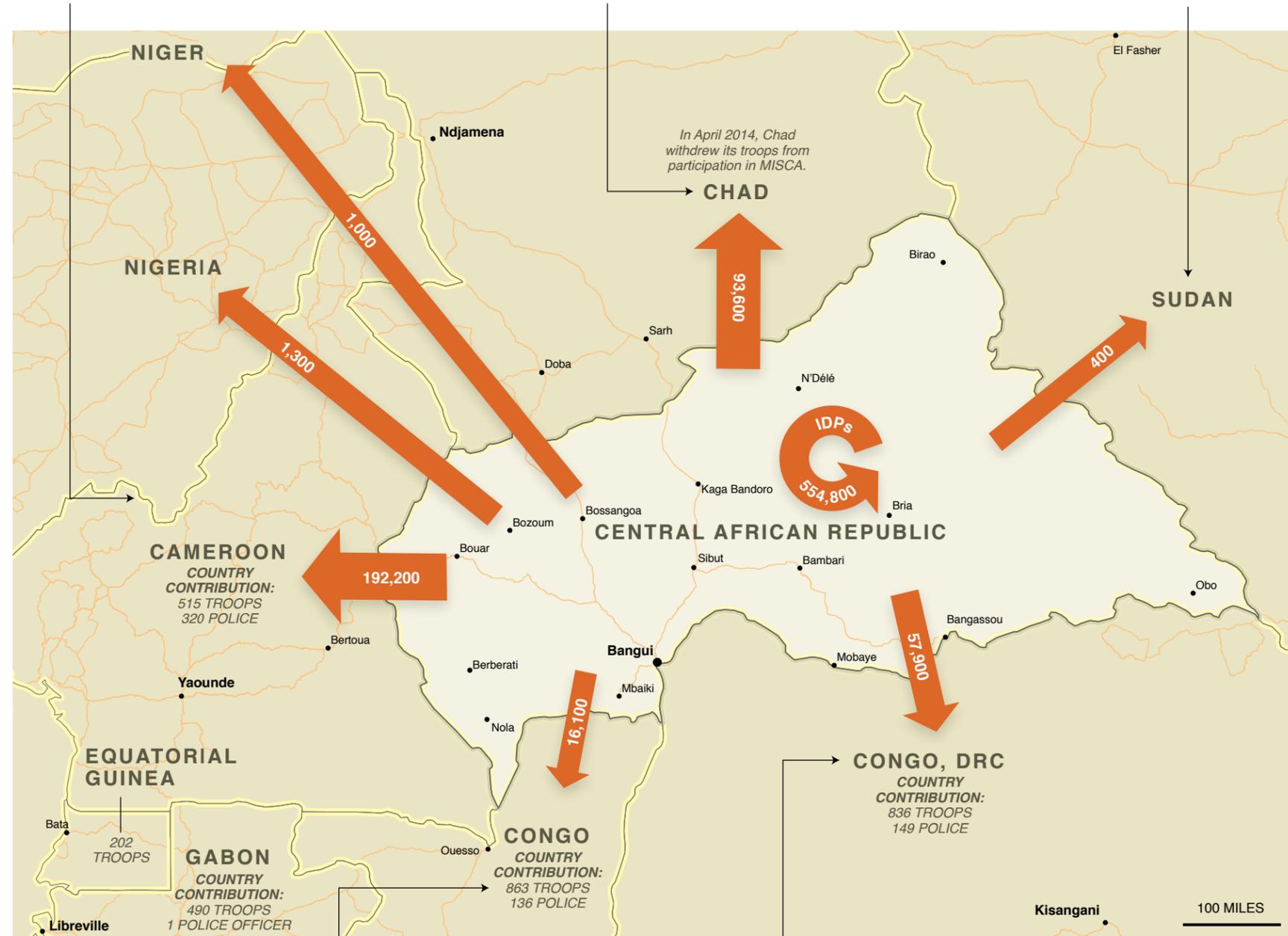
Former CAR President Bozizé fled to Cameroon following his ouster by Seleka in March 2013. Cameroon is a member of the regional grouping that originally sent troops to CAR, and is an important trading partner for CAR.

CHAD

Chad argued against a UN peacekeeping mission in CAR, with which it has long been politically intertwined. In January 2014, President Idriss Deby pressured interim CAR president, Djotodia, to leave office. Chadian mercenaries have fought alongside Seleka and, that month a UN human rights mission found that some Chadian peacekeepers had participated in killings with Seleka. Deby has sent special forces to CAR to coordinate the evacuation of Muslims from Bangui and CAR's north and southwest. Some of these special forces have killed CAR civilians.

SUDAN

The Seleka has both fighters and weapons from Sudan. In late 2013, large swaths of CAR's Ombella M'Poko province was under the command of Sudanese fighters. While it is not clear if Khartoum has been supporting the Seleka, many Seleka leaders have relations with Sudan.



REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

President Denis Sassou Nguesso took an early leading role in regional peacekeeping initiatives after CAR's coup in March 2013, and lent Djotodia \$50 million to help pay civil servants' salaries that had been in arrears since early 2013.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)

Has been embroiled in, and affected by, political developments in CAR, with which it shares a long border. The former vice president, Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, is on trial at the International Criminal Court for crimes committed in CAR while defending former President Ange-Félix Patassé from a coup launched by Bozizé in 2003.

SOURCES: European Union; OCHA; UNHCR

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU has agreed to deploy 1,000 troops and, while it's unclear which countries will provide them, Sweden, Spain, Finland, Estonia, and Romania have all signaled a willingness to contribute (as did Georgia, not an EU member). Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands offered logistical and medical support. It remains a key donor to the AU peacekeeping mission.

UNITED STATES

The US closed its embassy in Bangui in December 2012 due to security concerns after the government's overthrow, but has since helped to transport peacekeepers from Rwanda and Burundi. As of December 2013, the United States had pledged \$100 million to the AU-led mission. In March, the White House signaled in its budget request to Congress that it was prepared to support new expenses for a mission in the Central African Republic.

FRANCE

CAR's former colonizer has urged other nations, including EU countries, to bolster peacekeeping in CAR. In December 2013, France deployed 2,000 soldiers to try and stop the killings, but its effort had limited impact on the anti-Muslim violence. In April 2014, France voted along with the other members of the Security Council to establish a UN peacekeeping force of nearly 12,000 in CAR.

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF CENTRAL AFRICAN STATES

Currently chaired by Chad, the regional body tried to facilitate negotiations between Bozizé and the Seleka before Bangui fell in March 2013, and helped to establish the short-lived transitional government under former interim President Djotodia. The AU took over ECCAS's 2,500-strong FOMAC peacekeeping force in December 2013.

BENIN

A member of the Economic Community of Central African States and host to former interim President Djotodia, who, with his Beninois wife, sought asylum there in January 2014 amid international pressure to step down.

AFRICAN UNION

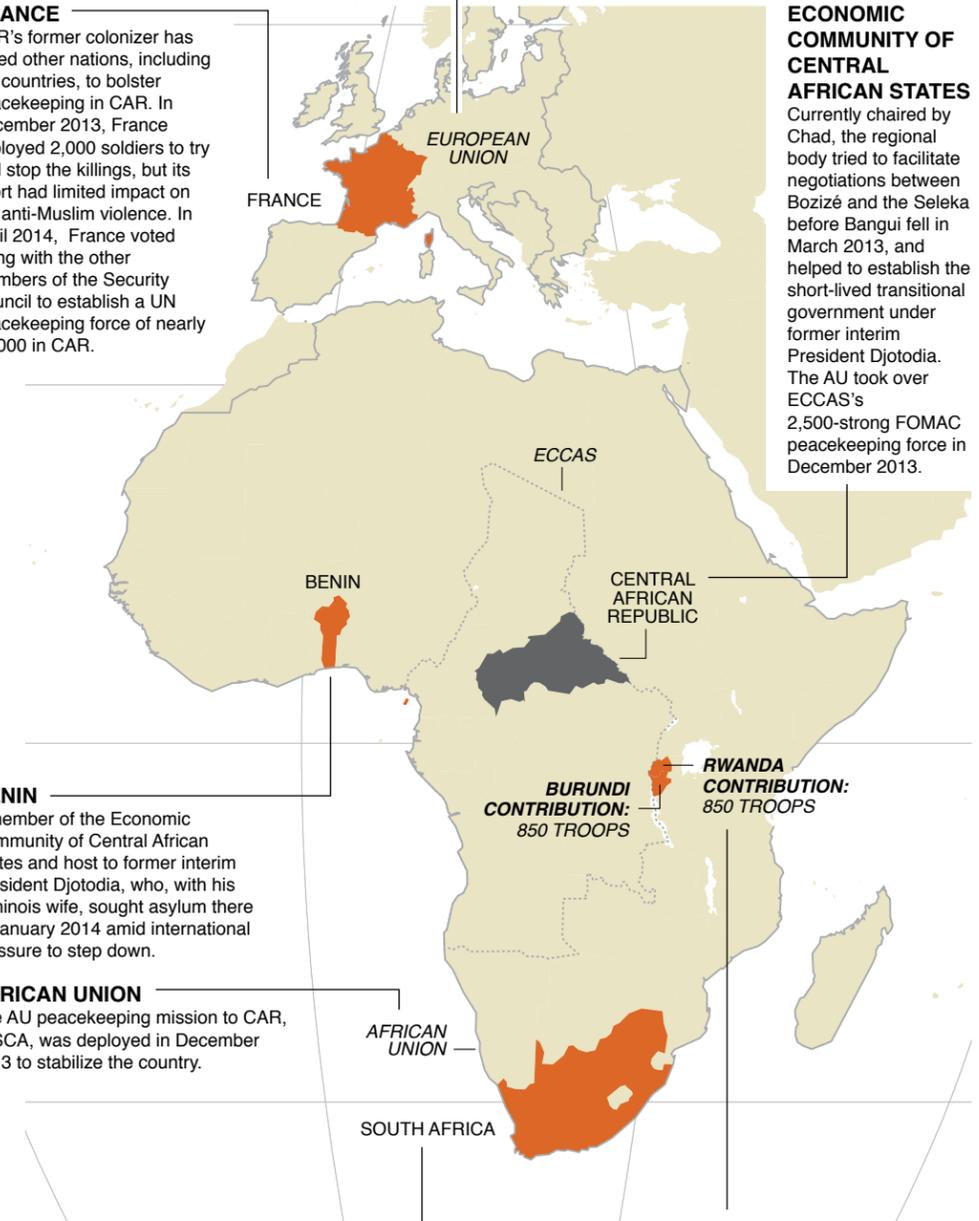
The AU peacekeeping mission to CAR, MISCA, was deployed in December 2013 to stabilize the country.

SOUTH AFRICA

Renewed its military cooperation agreement with CAR in December 2012, providing its army with training and "refurbishment" of military infrastructure. South Africa's military also supported disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs in CAR, and assisted in its 2011 elections. Although it deployed 200 troops to CAR in January 2013, it withdrew them in April after 13 soldiers were killed trying to defend the capital.

RWANDA

Currently holds a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which it has used to advocate for a commission of inquiry to look into crimes committed in CAR since January 2013.



BY PHILIPPE BOLOPION

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM RWANDA AND BOSNIA



Grieving survivors of ethnic cleansing in the town of Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina. More than 8,000 Bosnian men were killed in the Srebrenica massacre, the worst slaughter in Europe since World War II. © 1995 AP Photo/Ron Haviv/VII

When is a human rights crisis so bad that the international community should act to intervene? With thousands of people killed in the last 18 months, and the conflict having taken a tragic sectarian turn, the Central African Republic certainly qualifies. The world is responding, albeit slowly, to the crisis.

And how this peacekeeping exercise is now handled will likely become a test case for advocates of the relatively new international doctrine known as the “Responsibility to Protect,” or R2P.

R2P was born after the mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia, when a group of high-level diplomats and scholars, working under United Nations auspices, hammered out a new doctrine – not quite international law, but more than just words on paper. In 2005 the concept was endorsed by the UN General Assembly and, despite reservations by countries such as Russia and China, it seemed the world had finally agreed not to stand by as populations fall victim to genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. R2P offered a menu of options for how to address such volatile situations before it is too late.

The Central African Republic looks like a classic test case for the R2P doctrine. And to its credit, the UN has not been short on warnings. “We have an opportunity, and the responsibility, to prevent what could become widespread atrocities,” warned UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in late 2013. Following a trip to the country, John Ging, the UN’s operations director for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said on November 13th that he was “very concerned that the seeds of genocide are being sown.”

Indeed, R2P is now routinely mentioned in UN Security Council resolutions. It is widely invoked to justify intervention conducted in the name of endangered civilians, as happened in Libya and Ivory Coast. Yet strikingly, in discussing the Central African Republic,

advocates of greater international involvement and most policymakers have shied away from R2P. Even the French government stayed clear of invoking the norm when it sent additional troops to CAR in December 2013.

Does this mean that R2P is losing its relevance? Has the norm become so controversial as to become unusable? “Libya has given R2P a bad name,” India’s UN ambassador, Hardeep Singh Puri, said shortly after the end of the war in late 2011. The feeling resonated with many countries that felt that, in Libya, Western powers had gone well beyond the UN mandate to protect civilians by pursuing the defiant Muammar Qaddafi until they successfully removed him from power. For these countries, some of which had initially supported the intervention, Libya left a bitter taste, confirming their worst fears that R2P was just another ploy for powerful countries to impose their will on weaker states. The postwar upheavals of the new Libya have not helped alleviate the concerns, and R2P advocates are having a hard time shaking off the unwanted controversy now surrounding the idea of intervention.

Similarly, the abysmal failure of the international community to address the mass killing of Syrian civilians is leading many people to conclude that if R2P can’t help the Syrians, it’s not worth the paper it’s been written on.

Yet predicting the demise of R2P on this basis would miss a crucial element. Although not explicitly invoked, the ideas underlying R2P have implicitly infused the world’s reaction to the crisis in the Central African Republic. It is a sign perhaps that far from being irrelevant, R2P has gone



A wounded anti-balaka fighter in the PK12 neighborhood of Bangui under the watch of French peacekeepers as he waits for the Red Cross to arrive and evacuate him.
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mainstream in prompting international action to protect civilians. The wider acceptance of R2P in fact helps explain why a forgotten country, with neither natural resources nor any real strategic interest, has slowly earned greater attention than it otherwise might have.

The first step in this process was getting the word out, that people were being murdered, displaced, and attacked by wanton rebel groups. Researchers like Human Rights Watch's Peter Bouckaert and Lewis Mudge, and Amnesty International's Joanne Mariner, were on the scene, writing news releases, tweets, and dispatches about the horrors they witnessed. Journalists like Cyril Bensimon from *Le Monde* were striving to put the country on the front pages to catch policymakers' attention and compel them to support enhanced peacekeeping in a country on the brink. I testified in front of the US House Subcommittee on Africa; briefed diplomats at the White House, the State Department, the French Foreign Ministry at the Quai d'Orsay, and the French Ministry of Defense. I met with almost every single UN Security Council member, urging quick action to save lives.

As an advocate working the corridors of UN headquarters, I saw the news of the growing crisis penetrate the bureaucracy. A few officials, such as the UN genocide adviser, Adama Dieng, were trying to get the word out. French diplomats struggled to enlist Security Council support. US Ambassador Samantha Power, using her celebrity status and anti-genocide expertise, visited the Central African Republic in December 2013. She helped put the issue on the map in Washington and drum up further support for the peacekeepers.

It is true that a few UN members had qualms about yet another massive mission that might be seen as infringing on the sovereignty of a country that had previously been colonized. Yet, during my second trip to Bangui in March 2014 when I met with various ministers and government officials, it became clear that they had none of these concerns. Most were sitting in offices that had been completely looted, with no computers, phone lines, or basic security against the armed men roaming around. They were desperate for outside help. Any help. The deployment of additional French and

African Union peacekeepers in December and January had not been enough to prevent widespread violence, especially against the Muslim population, who by then were suffering retaliation for earlier attacks by the Seleka militias against Christians.

The 12,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission authorized by the Security Council in April 2014 will hopefully be a more robust mission, and better suited to the task at hand. As UN peacekeeping missions go, this one has a broad mandate to protect civilians, monitor human rights, and help establish basic rule of law. But it remains to be seen what these troops can truly accomplish. In a country where the few remaining state institutions have been completely destroyed, international troops have no real credible domestic partners to help keep the peace. And whether the troops will be properly vetted, supplied, and professionally commanded remains to be seen.

With CAR presenting little strategic interest to Security Council members, other than the potential of regional destabilization caused by another failed state that could become a magnet for terrorist groups with a radical

Will France and the African Union be credited for putting the lives of their soldiers on the line to protect civilians in such a remote place?

Islamist agenda, there has been little pressure to act. But the absence of perceived hidden agendas should have made this an R2P intervention with a more single-mindedly humanitarian motive.

Though the language of the responsibility of states to protect their citizens has become commonplace in Security Council statements, R2P language rarely turns into R2P action. Due to US budgetary concerns and lack of interest by many states, the authorization of a UN peacekeeping mission took too long. Its deployment has not yet started. In the meantime, the Muslim population that had lived in peace in the country for many generations faced vicious attacks. But it's also true that France and the African Union took important steps by committing troops early on, even



Refugees from Rwanda cross the border of former Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) after the 1994 genocide. © 1994 Corinne Dufka

before the Security Council authorized the peacekeeping mission. These troops probably played a key role in sparing the country the type of widespread and systematic massacres that bloodied Rwanda 20 years ago, when Hutu extremists carried out a genocide aimed at wiping out the Tutsi minority.

One of the curses of R2P intervention is that when many lives are lost and failures and shortcomings are all too apparent, defining success can be more difficult. Who will claim that in CAR genocide was averted thanks to outside intervention? Will France and the AU forces be credited for putting the lives of their soldiers on the line to protect civilians in a remote place that few governments care about? Or will they be criticized for their paralysis and inability to protect the Muslim minority, which was relentlessly attacked and driven out of Bangui and many other areas under their watch?

The CAR intervention will probably go down in R2P history as a missed opportunity, a place where the worst might well have been prevented, but where so many more lives could have been saved had the international community reacted decisively when they had all the information they needed, but somehow lacked the will to act. At the same time, I'm sure the human rights campaigners who worked the corridors of the UN before me, as genocides unfolded in Bosnia and Rwanda in the early 1990s and the world stood helplessly by, would have been glad to have R2P as a basis for their advocacy.



THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

BY VIVENNE WALT

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF SAMUEL FOSSO

AFRICA'S LEGENDARY LENSMAN

SAMUEL FOSSO

FEW AFRICAN PHOTOGRAPHERS ENJOY AS MUCH ACCLAIM IN THE ART WORLD AS SAMUEL FOSSO, 52, WHO BEGAN SHOOTING STARTLING SELF-PORTRAITS WHEN HE WAS JUST 13 YEARS OLD. BORN IN CAMEROON OF NIGERIAN PARENTS, FOSSO LIVED WITH HIS UNCLE IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC'S CAPITAL AND SENT HIS SELF-PORTRAITS TO HIS MOTHER IN NIGERIA AS A WAY OF TELLING HER THAT ALL WAS WELL WITH HIM. INDEED IT WAS, UNTIL THE COUNTRY'S DESCENT INTO CHAOS LAST YEAR. FOSSO FLED THE COUNTRY ON JANUARY 6, 2014, AND ON FEBRUARY 3, LOOTERS LAID SIEGE TO HIS BANGUI HOME, SMASHING THE FURNITURE AND THE SINKS AND STEALING WHATEVER THEY COULD.

Left: Self-portrait as Martin Luther King Jr.



Photojournalist Marcus Bleasdale salvages a box containing Samuel Fosso's archives.
© 2014 Peter Bouckaert/Human Rights Watch

But they left behind Fosso's precious archives — perhaps some of the most valuable items in all of Bangui. Trampled underfoot in the dust outside the shattered front door, the photos (signed prints worth thousands of dollars) lay abandoned as worthless junk. Passing by, AP photographer Jerome Delay scrambled to salvage hundreds of photographs and negatives. The next day, he rallied the Human Rights Watch emergency director, Peter Bouckaert, to join the rescue effort. "Photographers' horror, the priceless archives of world-renowned photographer Samuel Fosso," Bouckaert tweeted from Bangui on February 5, showing the looting. "We rescued what we could."

Some of the salvaged prints now lie in the gallery of Fosso's Paris agent, Jean-Marc Patras. Fosso fled to the French capital on Jan. 6 as gunmen closed in on his neighborhood. His wife and four children had escaped last July to Nigeria, but Fosso was determined to stay in Bangui as long as possible. In the end, he fled too hurriedly to grab his archives. "When his house was looted it was the top nightmare, but I thanked God he and his family was safe," Patras said, adding that he felt "sad, devastated" at the prospect that Fosso's work might have been destroyed or burned in the attack on his house. "Then when we learned that the negatives were saved, I thought it was a sort of rebirth."

With his family scattered, and his Bangui home in ruins, Fosso still hopes to return soon. From Paris, he is watching the conflict engulf his adopted land and ravage the city he has called home since his youth; most of his friends, he says, have fled. His message to a new generation of African artists, he says, is: "Never lose hope." The same might be said to those caught in the spiraling violence of the Central African Republic.

BY MARLOES KRIJNEN, DIRECTOR, FOAM MUSEUM

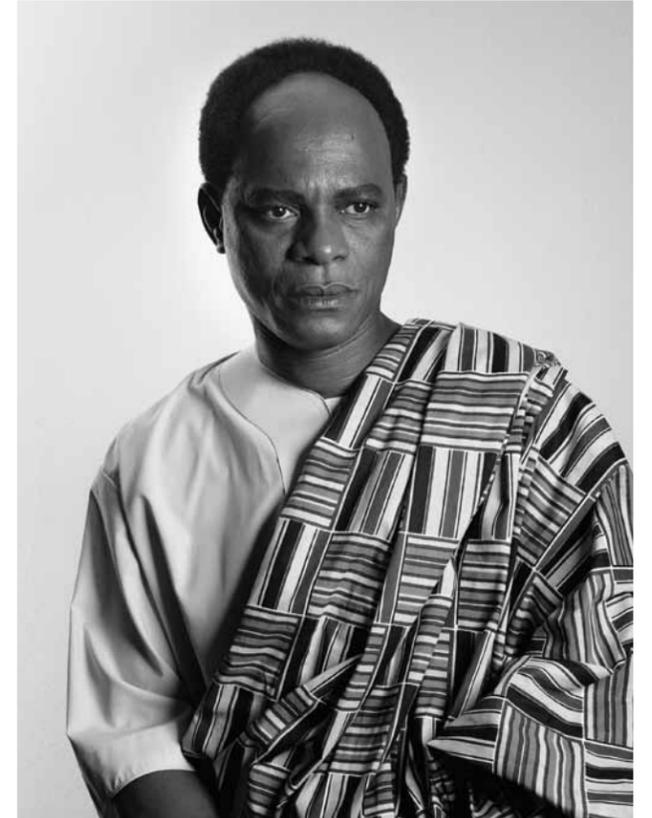
I first became aware of Samuel Fosso's work several years ago, especially the black-and-white series African Spirits. What struck me in the series was the fact that Mr. Fosso managed to really be these historical figures. First you see Malcolm X or Angela Davis, and then you see the handsome Fosso. By the use of props, subtle gestures or the look in his eyes, Mr. Fosso managed to put himself in the shoes of these people. African Spirits came naturally from the earlier photographs in which Fosso portrays himself dressed in the cool African urban style of the 1970s. I decided in 2007 to publish the series in an issue of Foam Magazine about portraits.

Samuel Fosso has become an international superstar in the field of art and photography. His work was exhibited at Recontres de la Photographie Africaine in Mali, Noorderlicht Photofestival in The Netherlands, Tate Modern in London and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. At the same time, Mr. Fosso continued to run the portrait studio that he started as a teenager. He was taking memorial portraits and passport photographs while practicing his art on the side. The local community of Miskin, the Muslim Quarter of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, remained largely unaware of his international success as an artist.

During a time when commercial photography and museum art photography function in separated contexts, Samuel Fosso has become one of an increasingly rare species of people who are both artists and photographers. He "earned" his place in art history already years ago but in addition kept his studio archive to serve as an archive of collective identities. It is important to preserve this and to keep this as a visual record of a local community in Bangui. Especially in times of conflict and turmoil.



Self-portrait as Malcolm X.



Self-portrait as Kwame Nkrumah.

INTERVIEW WITH SAMUEL FOSSO

HRW: Your photography was first of all a question of economics.

SF: Yes, I had a photography studio. If there were frames left on the roll of film, what we call pauses, I wasn't going to waste them. And so I took a photograph of myself. I wanted to learn photography, to work as a photographer. But I also wanted to be photographed. Later on I took self-portraits, as a souvenir, and also to give to my parents, because I lived in Bangui and my parents were in Nigeria.

HRW: What is the reaction of African people to your photographs?

SF: When I have an exhibition anywhere in Africa, people love it. People say that maybe I am magician, that what I do is impossible. Maybe this is what God asked me to do and I do it. Everybody loves what I do.

HRW: Who was your inspiration?

SF: Personally, I made self-portraits without knowing

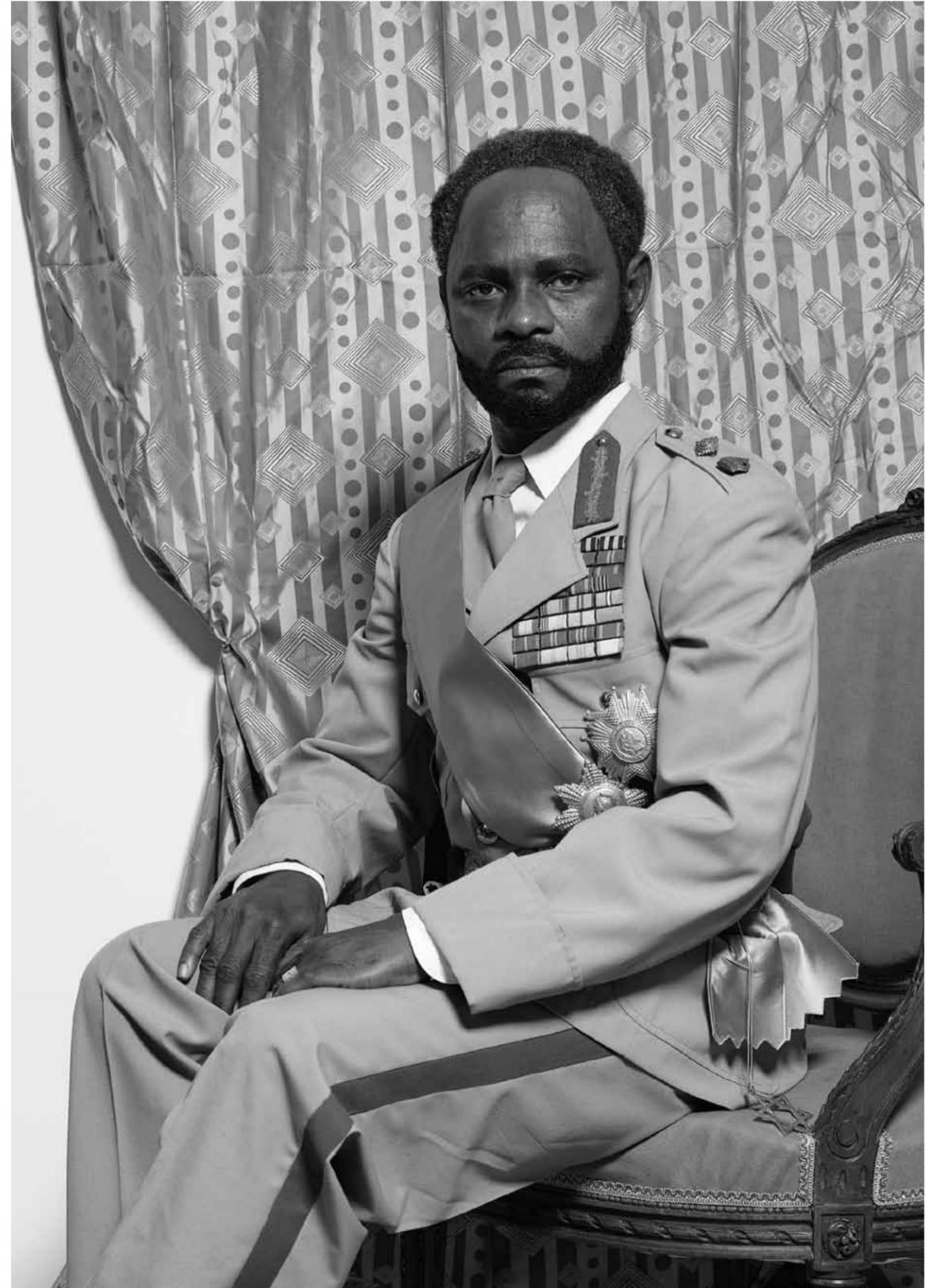
anybody else who made self-portraits. Since I was taking photographs of myself, I cannot think of anyone who was my inspiration. But there was someone outside of Africa, outside of Europe, in the United States, Cindy Sherman, and she did what I was doing. And I said, "That's good." When I was making self-portraits, it was for myself.

HRW: What are the challenges and the opportunities of being an African photographer?

SF: In Africa, nobody knew that what we were doing was art. If I remember correctly, the first meeting of African photography was in Bamako in 1994 and Westerners discovered that Africans were making art photography too. In Central African Republic, there are photography artists that are still unknown, like I was before. When you talk about natural resources, there are also resources in the arts. People make butterflies, people make everything. There is craftsmanship, there is everything. But it remains to be discovered.



Self-portrait as Nelson Mandela.



Self-portrait as Haile Selassie.



Self-portrait as Muhammad Ali.



Self-portrait as Angela Davis.

HRW: What do your friends in Bangui say about what is happening in CAR? And why is it happening?

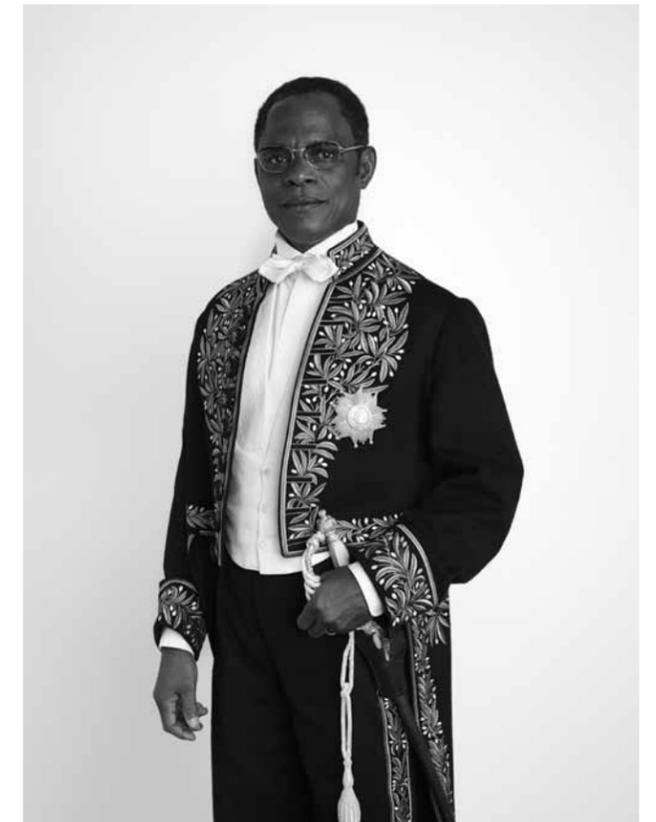
SF: I don't know the reason for what is happening. As for my friends in Bangui, some are on the border with Cameroon and others are on the border with Chad. Some are also on the border with Democratic Republic of Congo. When I left Bangui, they left too.

HRW: The day you left Bangui, was it too sudden to take your archives with you?

SF: I left suddenly. There was a lot of crossfire, lots of guns. So when it stopped I seized the opportunity. I had already missed the Air France flight that I was supposed to catch [a weekly direct Bangui-Paris flight]. And a week later, I left to avoid stray bullets.

HRW: Do you miss Bangui and do you think you will go back?

SF: I want to go back soon. My family left before I did. My wife and my four children are Nigerian. They left in July to Nigeria.



Self-portrait as Léopold Sédar Senghor.

HRW: Tell us about your current work now, on Mao Zedong? [The new series is called "Emperor of Africa" and features Fosso dressed as Mao in various locales.]

SF: I made Mao because the Chinese are coming. They have replaced the Europeans in Africa, economically speaking. You see it everywhere in Africa, even in Central African Republic. So we regard them like kings. After the first [African] kings, the Europeans were the second kings, and the Chinese now.

For the Chinese, it is, 'Quick! Quick!' Many Chinese [exploit] all the African resources, wood, diamonds, oil, everything. What will the environment be like tomorrow? That's a question I can't answer.

HRW: What is the most important thing for the new generation of African photographers to know?

SF: It's very hard to make a name for yourself in photography. Those of us who are a little known today across the world, we didn't start yesterday. So for my African photography brothers and sisters: be patient. Patience is the security of things ■

WHAT'S TO BE DONE?

1. The United Nations should swiftly **DEPLOY A PEACEKEEPING MISSION** with a strong civilian component to help rebuild CAR and protect civilians.
2. French and African Union peacekeeping forces should review their operational strategy to **MAXIMIZE THEIR ABILITY TO HALT ABUSES** while they are occurring, protecting civilians, especially those at risk.
3. The European Union and AU members should **INCREASE IMMEDIATE SUPPORT** to the French and AU forces, until the UN peacekeeping mission is in place.
4. Both the government and international forces should **PROMOTE PUBLIC MESSAGES** on the radio about tolerance, reconciliation, and the **FULL AND EQUAL CITIZENSHIP** of Muslim residents.
5. President Catherine Samba-Panza should **HOLD BOTH SIDES IN THE CONFLICT TO ACCOUNT** for abuses, with international support.
6. The UN and humanitarian aid organizations should **EXPAND RELIEF EFFORTS** across CAR.
7. UN human rights monitors should deploy in greater numbers and **PUBLICLY REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS** they document.