



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Materials Published by Human Rights Watch
since the March 2013 Seleka Coup

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WATCH

Central African Republic

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Central African Republic

Materials Published Since the Seleka Coup

This document contains much of Human Rights Watch's reporting on the human rights situation in the Central African Republic following the March 24, 2013 coup d'état against former President François Bozizé. For all of Human Rights Watch's work on Central African Republic, including photographs, satellite imagery, and reports, please visit our website: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/central-african-republic>.

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The Central African Republic Has Become a Nightmare for Muslims

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/16/central-african-republic-has-become-nightmare-muslims>

March 16, 2014 – Op-ed Published in *The Washington Post*

Halima, a 25-year-old Muslim, could not hold back tears when we met again recently in Bossempte, about 185 miles north of Bangui, in the Central African Republic. She was living under the protection of the Catholic Church, after the anti-balaka militia slaughtered more than 80 Muslims in Bossempte.

For the past six months, such militias have sought to avenge the devastation wrought by the predominantly Muslim Seleka rebel group, which [took power last March](#) in this majority-Christian country.

When we first spoke, two days earlier, Halima said that her husband and father-in-law were among the dead and that she had not heard from her three children since they had run away from the killers. At that point, there were 270 Muslims left in Bossempte. Forty-eight hours later, only 80 Muslims remained at the mission — almost all women, children and people with disabilities.

In the interim, a convoy of commercial trucks had come through en route to Cameroon. Those strong enough took their chances: Parents abandoned children with disabilities; some men left their wives and kids. They were desperate to escape the nightmare that the Central African Republic has become for Muslims, who have paid with their lives for the Seleka's sins.

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

All around us were the abandoned. Ten-year-old Mikaila and his sister, Zenabu, 15, both paralyzed by polio, said that their parents had dropped them at the Catholic Mission after a January attack and had not returned. Al-Hadj Towra, 70, his hands and feet wasted away from leprosy, had been left bedridden in his home, where a priest found him two days later. The only force in this town that seems able to protect vulnerable Muslims from the anti-balaka are [the courageous Catholic priests and nuns](#) of the Bossempte tele mission. Father Bernard Kinre said he spent days looking for Muslim survivors after the January massacre. He embraced Iyasa, 12, a polio survivor, and recounted how he found the boy abandoned by a nearby river. Five days after the attack, Iyasa was still in shock. “He tried to run away from me when we found him,” Kinre said. “He thought I was the anti-balaka who came to kill him.”

The Catholics’ humanity, courage and leadership stand out amid the slaughter. They are virtually alone in trying to protect the vulnerable. France and the African Union have deployed thousands of peacekeepers; the United States and other governments have provided support to the peacekeeping mission. But their efforts to protect civilians pale next to the bravery exhibited by these clergy.

Most places I and a videographer visited in a five-day journey were emptied of Muslim residents, despite the presence of peacekeepers in many towns. The outnumbered French and African Union forces have often acted too passively, unable to prevent the looting and burning of homes and businesses that have forced Muslims to seek opportunities elsewhere.

[Entire Muslim communities have disappeared](#). Baoro was once home to at least 4,000 Muslims and more than a dozen mosques. Now there are none. The last Muslims of Boali, where the local Catholic priest sheltered 700 in his church, left for Cameroon. The last Muslims of Yaloke, where more than 10,000 had lived, left for Chad.

The last Muslim in Mbaiki, [Saleh Dido](#), was murdered recently by the anti-balaka, his throat slit as he tried to find shelter with police. Three weeks earlier, interim President Catherine Samba-Panza and the French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, had visited Mbaiki and declared it a “symbol of living together and reconciliation.” Now, its 4,000 Muslims are gone, their mosques destroyed.

Those who remain, such as the 4,000 or so Muslims in Boda, live in constant fear. Muslim families there are starving to death. A rake-thin man, Al-Haj Abdou Kadil, said he buried two of his children, Mousa, 3, and Mahamat, 4, the day before we met. They had died from hunger, and his wife was too weak to speak.

Too few peacekeepers were deployed too late; the challenge of disarming the Seleka, containing the anti-balaka and protecting the Muslim minority was underestimated. Now, their only option seems to be to facilitate evacuations, at the risk of contributing to the ethnic cleansing they were deployed to prevent.

Over the past six months, the Obama administration has provided financial and logistical support to the African Union mission and more than \$45 million in humanitarian assistance. It should do more to halt the violence of the anti-balaka, starting with making clear its support for a U.N. Security Council resolution that would authorize a peacekeeping mission with the resources, expertise and will necessary to protect civilians. Without this basic security, it will be even more expensive and painful to rebuild the Central African Republic.

UN: Authorize Peacekeeping Mission for Central African Republic

Leading Rights Groups Urge Rapid Action

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/13/un-authorize-peacekeeping-mission-central-african-republic>

March 13, 2014 – Press Release

(New York) – The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should immediately authorize the deployment of a strong UN peacekeeping mission in the [Central African Republic](#) (CAR), nine leading African and international human rights groups said today in a [joint letter](#) to the foreign ministers of security council member states. Such a mission, as envisioned in the report UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon submitted to the council on March 3, 2014, is urgently needed to protect civilians in the country.

The groups signing the letter are: Amnesty International, the Central African League for Human Rights (LCDH), the Central African Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH), Enough Project, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Human Rights Watch, Humanity United, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Invisible Children.

“With an entire year of bloodshed in CAR, the security council should have authorized a UN peacekeeping mission months ago,” said [Philippe Bolopion](#), UN director at Human Rights Watch. “There is a massive humanitarian and human rights crisis in the country, which has not received the response needed to protect thousands of people who have endured killings, rape, pillage, and displacement from their homes.”

The human rights crisis plaguing the country since the Seleka took power in March 2013 is compounded by complete impunity for serious human rights abuses. The country has experienced, according to the UN report, a “total breakdown of law and order,” with a collapsed justice system, wrecked correctional facilities, and security forces unable to function. Even the most blatant crimes have gone unpunished.

Despite an increase in international attention to this crisis, the UN secretary-general found a “grave deterioration of the human rights situation” in the country. The deployment of

close to 6,000 African Union (AU) troops and 2,000 French troops is, according to the UN, “not sufficient, and lacks the civilian component to adequately protect civilians.” French and AU forces have not been able to stem the flight of Muslim communities to neighboring countries. In Bangui, according to the UN, only 900 of 140,000 Muslims remain in the capital, and those left behind fear for their lives.

Seleka forces have retreated to the north with most of their weapons and equipment and continue to pose a serious threat to civilians. Anti-balaka forces continue to torment the few remaining Muslim residents in the country.

The joint letter says that only a strong UN peacekeeping mission, with the resources and the civilian expertise needed to improve the protection of civilians, can help create conditions conducive to the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid, help re-establish the basic functions of the rule of law in the country, create the conditions for a safe and voluntary return of displaced people, monitor and report publically on human rights violations, and disarm and reintegrate armed elements.

“The residents of Central African Republic have waited long enough,” said Bolopion. “The time for action by the UN Security Council is now.”

Joint Letter to Foreign Ministers of UNSC Member States: Authorize Peacekeeping Mission for Central African Republic

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/12/joint-letter-foreign-ministers-unsc-member-states-authorize-peacekeeping-mission-cen>

March 13, 2014 – Letter

Dear Minister,

We write to urge you to use your seat on the UN Security Council to authorize without delay the deployment of a strong UN peacekeeping mission, as envisioned in the report UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon submitted on March 3, to protect civilians under attack in the Central African Republic (CAR).

Despite an increase in international attention to this crisis, the UN Secretary-General found a “grave deterioration of the human rights situation” in the country. The deployment of close to 6,000 African Union troops and 2,000 French troops is, according to the UN, “not sufficient, and lacks the civilian component to adequately protect civilians.”

Our research supports UN findings. Over the last few months, as Seleka militia retreated to the North-East, committing a last spate of violence against civilians, anti-balaka launched a relentless wave of attacks, sometimes calling them, according to the UN report, “cleansing operations,” which targeted the country’s Muslim minority.

French and AU forces have not been able to stem the flight of entire Muslim communities to neighboring countries. In Bangui, according to the UN, only 900 of 140,000 Muslims remain, and those left behind fear for their lives. In the northwestern towns of Baoro, Boali, and Yaloke, as well as others, once home to thousands of Muslims, the last Muslim residents have fled, and dozens of mosques have been destroyed by anti-balaka, as witnessed by our researchers. Those remaining, in towns like Boda, include many who were simply too weak or infirm to flee.

According to the UN, the anti-balaka are “becoming increasingly organized in Bangui and other parts of the country and have access to firearms and heavy weapons.” Anti-balaka

militia continue to pose an imminent threat to CAR's remaining Muslims, as well as to other civilians. Seleka forces have retreated to the north with most of their weapons and equipment and will continue to pose a serious threat to civilians unless disarmed.

The human rights crisis plaguing the country since the Seleka took over power in March 2013 is compounded by a complete impunity for serious human rights abuses, including scores of killings, rapes, looting, and the destruction of entire villages. The country has experienced, according to the UN report, a "total breakdown of law and order," with a collapsed justice system, wrecked correctional facilities, and security forces unable to function. Even the most blatant crimes have gone unpunished. Our organizations are, for example, unaware of any arrest made following the brutal lynching of a man at the end of the February 5th ceremony marking the return of the national army, even though dozens of soldiers and international journalists witnessed, and in some cases filmed, the event. We believe that the deployment of 10,000 UN peacekeepers and 1,820 police, as recommended by the UN Secretary-General, would go a long way toward keeping armed groups in check, pulling the country back from the brink of anarchy, and allowing tens of thousands of civilians to go back to their homes and start rebuilding their lives.

Only a strong UN peacekeeping mission will have the resources and the civilian expertise to improve the protection of civilians, create conditions conducive to the delivery of desperately needed humanitarian aid, help reestablish the basic functions of the rule of law in the country, create the conditions for a safe and voluntary return of displaced people, monitor and report publically on human rights violations, and disarm and reintegrate armed elements.

At a time of global financial constraints, we realize that the proposed peacekeeping mission will come at a price for taxpayers. But we are convinced that inaction would come at a greater price, both for the international community and for the people under threat in the country, for whom the UN is the only true source of help.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
Central African League for Human Rights (LCDH)
Central African Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH)

Enough Project
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Human Rights Watch
Humanity United
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Invisible Children

Seleka Fighters Attack Village

French, African Forces Should Step Up Protection Patrols

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/11/central-african-republic-seleka-fighters-attack-village>

March 11, 2014 – Press Release

(Bangui) – Heavily armed Seleka fighters joined by Muslim Peuhl cattle herders on February 26, 2014, carried out a deadly attack on the village of Bowai, northeast of Bossangoa, Human Rights Watch said today. The attack killed eight people, and at least 10 others – mostly young children – were wounded by gunfire. After the civilian population fled, the attackers burned many buildings in the village, in some cases trapping people in their homes prior to setting them alight.

Human Rights Watch warned that further Seleka attacks on civilians could occur, and urged French and African forces to step up patrols in the area, located around 60 kilometers northeast of Bossangoa. France, the African Union (AU), the European Union, and concerned countries should urgently bolster efforts to provide effective protection to civilians, including by deploying additional troops and by strengthening AU troops already on the ground.

“Seleka fighters have returned to the Bossangoa area to continue their deadly attacks on the local population,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. “French and AU forces should put troops in the region to prevent further Seleka attacks.” According to multiple eyewitness accounts collected by Human Rights Watch, as well as confidential information from humanitarian sources, a large group of heavily armed Seleka fighters, supported by Peuhl cattle herders, surrounded the village of Bowai at about midday on February 26 and immediately began firing randomly at the population, who fled in terror. The Peuhl are a predominantly Muslim ethnic group who dominate the cattle trade in West and Central Africa.

Innocent Daibenamna, 44, told Human Rights Watch he was at his home in the village when the attack started at about 1 p.m.:

It was the Seleka and the Peuhl who came to attack us, and started burning all the homes. They came on foot and were heavily armed; there were over 100 of them. They first encircled the village, so we couldn't escape. The Seleka fighters were in military uniforms with red and green berets, but the Peuhl were in their traditional dress. They were armed with Kalashnikovs, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavy caliber machine guns.... When the shooting started, we all ran away into the bush in fear. Then they came inside the village and burned all the homes. Eight people, we know, have died, and we brought 10 wounded to Bossangoa, but other children are still missing and may be dead in the bush as well.

Seleka and Peuhl fighters shot Maxim Beamkoma, 35, in the foot, locked him in his home, and set it on fire with him inside. He survived the assault:

I was sitting at my house when the Seleka and Peuhl attacked. They started firing and I fled inside the house, and at that time I was shot and wounded in the foot. Then, they locked me inside and put the thatch roof on fire above me. I knew that if I went outside they would kill me, so I had to stay inside the burning house.

Hortense Dansio, a 21-year-old mother, told Human Rights Watch that she fled the attackers with her 1-year-old daughter, Aminata Beamkona, in her arms, but the baby, while being carried, was shot in both legs by a Seleka fighter:

The baby was in my arms when we fled, as the Seleka and Peuhl attacked. I saw the one who shot us. He was a Seleka in military uniform. He aimed for us and shot and wounded Aminata in her legs, and I had to keep running.

The surviving villagers told Human Rights Watch that the majority of the wounded were young children, and that at least three of the dead were children as well. Debonheur Beamkona, 4, was wounded in the legs by the same bullet that killed his mother, Yasmine Nganassem, 24, who was carrying him while fleeing. His grandmother, Catherine Goudongoye, 54, was also shot dead. Irma Beamkoma, 4, was shot dead as she tried to flee. Divina Beamkoma, 7, was also shot in the legs while fleeing. More than a dozen children and adults are still missing and feared dead, including Girabelle Bassanguanam,

13, and Geraldine Beamkoma, 7.

“The brutality of the Seleka fighters remains undiminished – most of the dead and wounded from Bowai were women and children fleeing in terror,” said Bouckaert. “Seleka fighters should be held to account for these heinous crimes.”

The February 26 attack on Bowai was the first major Seleka attack in the Bossangoa area in months, following the containment of Seleka fighters in Bossangoa by French forces in December, and their [departure](#) from Bossangoa in mid-January. However, Seleka fighters also carried out attacks northwest of Bossangoa, on the village of Boguila on February 28, and the village of Nana Baria on March 7. In both attacks, the Seleka fighters looted humanitarian organizations and stole humanitarian vehicles. The fighters also burned civilian homes and fired at the population to force them to flee their villages.

The continued presence and movement of the Seleka in the area around Bossangoa poses a threat to many nearby villages.

Bowai was also the target of an August 28, 2013, attack when the Seleka commander of Nana Bakasa, Captain Ousman, surrounded the village and detained 11 of its village chiefs, leaving only the Muslim village chief free. The detained village chiefs were tied up with their hands and feet behind their backs in a painful method of torture, which can lead to long-term paralysis of the arms and legs. Captain Ousman then demanded ransoms of 50,000 CFA (US\$100) per village chief. The villagers paid the ransoms, fearing for the lives of the chiefs, who were released and fled the village.

Legacy of Misrule *Questions and Answers*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/06/central-african-republic-legacy-misrule>

March 7, 2014 – Q&A

How did the Central African Republic reach its current violent state?

The modern history of Central African Republic begins in 1960 when it achieved independence from France, part of the wave of independence that swept across Africa. But since then, its people have been subjected to decades of misrule. Nearly every time power has changed hands, the transition has been marked by violence.

Between independence and early 2013, five men have led the country. Most were overthrown in coups, sometimes with external involvement. Nearly all the leaders silenced opposition, 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. Corruption by those in power has impeded the realization of the social and economic rights for Central African Republic's impoverished residents.

What set the stage for the latest coup and the violence?

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, leaving the country at the bottom for global development indicators. Rival rebel groups began fighting each other as well as the government. Bozizé had a falling out with Chad. Numerous peace agreements were signed by regional parties in 2011-2012, but peace proved short-lived.

How was the government overthrown in the spring of 2013?

A group of rebel factions calling itself "Seleka," or "Alliance," coalesced from among the anti-government militias. They were northern anti-government forces that had signed the peace agreements and were predominantly Muslim in a country where the majority of people are Christian. Changes stipulated under the peace deal – development aid for the north, the release of political prisoners, and justice for a northern leader who was forcibly "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.

Are the Seleka in power now?

No. Michel Djotodia, the Seleka leader who formally became president in August 2013, officially disbanded the Seleka in September, but they continued to commit atrocities. During their rule, the Seleka indiscriminately killed scores of civilians, engaged in rampant looting, and burned numerous villages to the ground. Their allies include foreign mercenaries and warlords from neighboring Sudan and Chad. The presence of foreign Muslim fighters has exacerbated tensions with the Christian majority, threatening a long history of harmony between the two groups.

In January Djotodia resigned as interim president, and the National Transitional Council elected Catherine Samba Panza, the mayor of Bangui, in his place.

How did the Christian population respond to Seleka violence?

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” - have indiscriminately attacked and killed Muslim civilians, equating all Muslims with the Seleka. Despite the history of Muslims and Christians living together relatively peacefully in Central African Republic, members of the anti-balaka have used incendiary rhetoric and brutal tactics against Muslim residents, many of whom have been forced to flee the country.

On December 5, the anti-balaka started an offensive on Bangui, displacing the Seleka. Now the Seleka remain active only in isolated pockets of the country.

Who is fighting whom?

From September to December, it was the Seleka and the anti-balaka – but they almost never fought each other directly. Each side attacked civilians from communities they believe are associated with their enemies. However, in 2014 things have changed. Many Seleka elements have fled to Chad, leaving a large part of the Muslim civilian population defenseless. Fifty thousand Muslims have been flown out of the country on emergency flights; tens of thousands more have fled in road convoys, frequently attacked by anti-

balaka forces on the way. If the violence against Muslims continues, an important part of society in Central African Republic could disappear.

What's different about the conflict this time?

The Christian-Muslim fighting adds a dangerous element to Central African Republic's history of violence. Despite the efforts of French and African Union peacekeepers, attacks against civilians are widespread. Both Christians and Muslims have been burned alive in their homes. Attackers have slit children's throats. Both sides share responsibility for these abuses. Rebuilding trust and institutions will take time, money, and a great deal of effort.

Muslim Communities Emptied

African, French Forces Insufficient to Stem Violence

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/06/central-african-republic-muslim-communities-emptied>

March 7, 2014 – Press Release

(Bangui) – Muslim residents of the [Central African Republic](#) have fled the country in droves in the face of persistent attacks by anti-balaka militias, Human Rights Watch said today after visiting numerous towns and villages in the northwestern part of the country. The presence of French and African Union peacekeepers in these areas has been insufficient to protect Muslim residents, who are being targeted by the anti-balaka in retaliation for horrific abuses committed by the predominantly Muslim Seleka group over the past year. The [European Union](#) and other concerned countries should immediately assist French and African Union forces trying to stabilize the country and halt the targeted anti-Muslim violence, Human Rights Watch said. The United Nations Security Council should urgently authorize a strong UN peacekeeping mission, as envisioned by the UN secretary-general, to protect civilians and provide the security necessary to rebuild the country, which has been devastated by massive human rights violations and a resulting humanitarian catastrophe.

“We are seeing entire Muslim communities that have lived in the Central African Republic for generations fleeing their homes,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. “Muslims in the Central African Republic are contending with unendurable conditions and horrific violence, and the African and French forces there have not been able to protect these residents.”

Human Rights Watch today also released new satellite imagery documenting the vast destruction of homes by anti-balaka militia and, earlier, by the Seleka coalition, which took power in a coup in March 2013.

The anti-balaka militia comprise mostly Christian and animist residents who came together in September to avenge attacks on Christians by the Seleka. French and African Union troops, deployed in December to halt Seleka violence, found instead a situation where the

anti-balaka were exerting greater control, forcing the Seleka to retreat and regroup, and making Muslim residents more vulnerable to looting and pillaging.

In the last week alone, Human Rights Watch observed some of the last Muslims of at least 10 locations in the northwestern region fleeing for Chad and Cameroon, just over Central African Republic's northern and western borders, respectively. On March 1, 2014, a convoy of commercial trucks heading for Cameroon, protected by African peacekeepers, evacuated Muslims from Boali, Bossempte, and Baoro.

In Boali, the convoy evacuated 650 Muslims who had lived under the protection of the Catholic Church for six weeks, leaving the town without any Muslim presence. In Baoro, the convoy evacuated the last 20 Muslims from the Catholic Church. That left the town, which once had a population of 4,000 Muslims and at least 12 mosques, without a single Muslim resident.

In Bossempte, the convoy evacuated about 190 Muslims, but left behind about 65 weak and vulnerable women, children, and people with disabilities who were unable to climb onto the trucks. Human Rights Watch found nine Muslim children with polio and one elderly man suffering from leprosy among those left behind.

Halima, 25, a severely malnourished Muslim woman, told Human Rights Watch that the anti-balaka killed her husband and father-in-law in January, and that her three children disappeared in the chaos. She had tried to climb onto the departing trucks on March 1, but found herself too weak: "No one was there to help me," she told Human Rights Watch in tears. "I was calling after them to take me, but they left without me."

"The depth of the suffering caused by anti-balaka violence is just unfathomable," Bouckaert said. "In a misguided attempt to avenge the destruction of the Seleka, anti-balaka forces are committing horrific abuses against residents simply because they are Muslim."

The Muslim community of Yaloké, which once exceeded 10,000 people, is now completely gone. The last Muslims there left for Chad a week ago. In many other towns and villages Human Rights Watch visited, including the large market towns of Zawa, Bekadili, and Boganangone, and the smaller town of Boguera, not a single Muslim remains.

On February 28, anti-balaka fighters killed the last Muslim in Mbaiki, which, as one of the largest population centers in the country, had a pre-conflict population of at least 4,000 Muslims. The anti-balaka also burned the city's two main mosques. They caught Saleh Dio, who had refused to leave the town and was trying to reach the safety of the police station, and cut his throat.

On February 12, the French defense minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, and the Central African Republic's interim president, Catherine Samba-Panza, had visited Mbaiki and declared it a "symbol" of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation.

Even in communities where Muslims remain, they face extreme violence from the anti-balaka. In Boda, a diamond trading center, an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 Muslims remain, but they are unable to leave the Muslim district of the town, despite the presence of French forces. Anti-balaka fighters have prohibited anyone from selling food to the Muslims, and on February 28, Human Rights Watch found that many of the Muslims in Boda were starving. The French are deployed between the Muslim and Christian communities, keeping them apart, but have been unable to end the food blockade, Human Rights Watch said.

Al-Haj Abdou Kadil, a frail Muslim man, told Human Rights Watch that he had buried two of his children, Mousa, 3, and Mohammed, 4, who died from hunger the day before. His wife was so weak from hunger that she was unable to speak.

In Bohong, a large cattle-raising town with many people from the Peuhl ethnic group, Human Rights Watch found 120 Muslims remaining in the mosque. They said that the anti-balaka had executed two ethnic Peuhl cattle raisers who had gone to look for their cows just 10 days before. When Human Rights Watch confronted the anti-balaka commanders about the execution, the commanders appeared to admit responsibility for the killing, saying, "They asked to go look for their cows, and we said, 'Sure,' and well, they didn't come back." The commanders then started to laugh.

Human Rights Watch acquired and analyzed satellite imagery that documents the scale of the destruction in more than 60 affected towns and villages in northwestern Central African Republic, including over the last several months, when more peacekeepers were deployed.

In Bossangoa, for example, satellite imagery shows the rapid displacement of thousands of local residents in early December 2013, as well as the systematic destruction of over 1,400 mostly residential buildings. Human Rights Watch observed and gathered accounts from witnesses to corroborate the exodus of virtually the entire Muslim community of Bossangoa, between 7,000 and 10,000 people. The residents sought protection at a nearby school, École Liberté, after anti-balaka attacks on December 5. A campaign of arson attacks on mostly residential buildings between mid-December and late January 2014 almost completely destroyed the Muslim neighborhood of Boro, in the northern half of town.

In Bohong, witnesses had told Human Rights Watch that Seleka forces attacked the town in late September 2013, deliberately targeting Christian neighborhoods, and leaving only the Muslim quarter in the southern part of the town relatively unscathed. Satellite imagery confirmed these findings and showed that more than 1,130 buildings – most of them residential – had probably been burned to the ground by early November.

When Human Rights Watch representatives met with the anti-balaka commanders in Bohong last week and asked if they would be willing to allow the remaining Muslims to stay there, the commander responded: “We have lost all of our homes because of the Seleka. They threw bodies down all of our water holes. And the Muslims are still living in their homes because they were with the Seleka – and now you ask us to tolerate their presence?” The commander asked for immediate humanitarian assistance to help the non-Muslim villagers rebuild their homes and lives.

Human Rights Watch found almost the same situation in Boda, where 892 non-Muslim homes were burned during inter-communal violence in early February. The anti-balaka commander there also told Human Rights Watch that he could not accept Muslims staying in their intact houses in Boda while non-Muslims were forced to sleep outside because the Seleka had destroyed their shelters.

“The humanitarian needs in the Central African Republic are dire, and if they are not addressed, they will contribute to further conflict,” Bouckaert said. “Donors should provide reconstruction assistance to those who have lost their homes, which could lessen the inter-communal tensions fueling the violence.”

Muslims Forced to Flee

Christian Militias Unleash Waves of Targeted Violence

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/12/central-african-republic-muslims-forced-flee>

February 12, 2014 – Press Release

The minority Muslim population in the [Central African Republic](#) is being targeted in a relentless wave of coordinated violence that is forcing entire communities to leave the country, Human Rights Watch said today. The Central African Republic government as well as French and African peacekeepers should take urgent steps to protect the remaining Muslim population from revenge attacks by predominantly Christian militias and allied residents.

The anti-balaka (“anti-machete”) militias are increasingly organized and using language that suggests their intent is to eliminate Muslim residents from the Central African Republic. The anti-balaka blame the Muslim population for the rise of the predominantly Muslim Seleka rebel group, which took power in March 2013 and committed [horrific abuses](#) against the country’s majority Christian population over the last 11 months. The Seleka, which have not publicly used religious language in justifying their actions, continue to engage in atrocities.

“At this rate, if the targeted violence continues, there will be no Muslims left in much of the Central African Republic,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), Emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. “People whose families have peacefully lived in the country for centuries are being forced to leave, or are fleeing the very real threat of violence against them.”

Throughout January 2014 and the first week of February, thousands of Muslim families from towns with sizable Muslim populations – Bossangoa, Bozoum, Bouca, Yaloké, Mbaiki, Bossembélé, and others in the northwest and southwest – fled horrific anti-balaka attacks. Yaloké, a major gold trading center, had an estimated Muslim population of 30,000 and eight mosques prior to the conflict. When Human Rights Watch visited on February 6, fewer than 500 Muslims and one mosque remained. Muslim residents gathered at the mosque, protected by French peacekeepers, while Christian militias and residents looted and destroyed their homes and mosques.

In Bangui, anti-balaka fighters, armed with AK-47s, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and grenades attacked numerous Muslim areas, forcing the population to flee. PK 12, PK13, Miskine, and Kilo 5 – all former Muslim strongholds in Bangui – are now ghost towns, devoid of Muslim residents. Some anti-balaka militants have told Human Rights Watch that they would kill any Muslims remaining in these neighborhoods.

At the abandoned Muslim neighborhood of PK13, Human Rights Watch researchers observed Christians claiming the looted and abandoned homes and marking them as the property of anti-balaka leaders. At the entrance to the neighborhood, a sign read “Attention: Antibalaka zone.”

Much of the Muslim population has fled to Chad, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. An estimated 50,000 Muslims—many of them Central African Republic nationals—have been flown out of Bangui’s military airport on evacuation flights organized by Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Senegal. Tens of thousands more have fled on road convoys, frequently attacked by anti-balaka forces on the way.

Elite Chadian military forces, sometimes assisted by the Chadian component of the African Union peacekeeping mission (MISCA), have also evacuated many thousands of Muslims from towns that have fallen under the control of the anti-balaka. The anti-balaka militias have not yet targeted Muslim populations in the northeastern part of the country, where Muslims are a majority.

The anti-balaka have conducted coordinated attacks on Muslim neighborhoods since September 2013. The attacks include horrific and brutal assaults, including on women and children, against Muslims trapped by fighting or trying to flee. Anti-balaka forces have cut the throats of Muslim civilians, publicly lynching, mutilating, and setting their bodies on fire. Human Rights Watch researchers have witnessed some of these atrocities.

Armed men within Muslim neighborhoods, including some remaining Seleka fighters, have attempted to fight back, but have been unsuccessful in warding off the assaults, which have also overwhelmed French and African peacekeepers.

“Whether the anti-balaka leaders are pursuing a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing or exacting abusive collective punishment against the Muslim population, the end result is clear: the disappearance of longstanding Muslim communities,” Bouckaert said.

“Ethnic cleansing,” although not a formal legal term, is defined as a purposeful policy by an ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.

The anti-balaka militias arose from village self-defense groups organized to fight banditry, but reemerged to fight against Seleka abuses. Anti-balaka members are drawn almost exclusively from the Christian and animist population. They swear an oath of secrecy and carry “gris-gris” amulets they believe make them immune from bullets and protect them from harm.

After the Seleka ousted President François Bozizé, members of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) and the elite Presidential Guard who remained loyal to Bozizé joined the anti-balaka militias in their fight against the Seleka, providing the militias with military expertise and weapons. While most anti-balaka fighters carry homemade shotguns, machetes, and knives, some appear in military uniform with AK-47 assault rifles and other automatic weapons. Human Rights Watch has observed the increasing presence in Muslim neighborhoods of anti-balaka forces attacking with automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and grenades.

On February 7, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that her office had received sufficiently serious allegations of crimes within the ICC’s jurisdiction to trigger the opening of a preliminary examination. Her office will conduct a fuller inquiry to determine whether to initiate a formal investigation, the next step toward bringing a new case. Her office already has one case pending in connection with crimes committed in 2002-03 in the country by Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, a Congolese national and former vice-president of the DRC who was invited to CAR in 2002 to help resist a coup attempt by Bozizé.

To provide effective civilian protection, particularly for the vulnerable Muslim population and its property, the African Union, European Union, and United Nations should immediately deploy additional peacekeeping troops throughout the country. Whenever possible, they should bolster their presence to protect at-risk Muslim communities from

anti-balaka terror. Their troops should actively confront anti-balaka forces and leaders responsible for attacks against Muslim civilians, and make clear that abuses against civilians will not be tolerated.

The new president of the Central African Republic, Catherine Samba-Panza should publicly and forcefully remind her constituents that the Muslim minority is part of the fabric of the country and that anyone exacting revenge on Muslim civilians for Seleka crimes will be held accountable. Public lynchings such as the one following the reinstatement of the national army should be promptly and visibly investigated.

“The international community should respond promptly and robustly to stop these coordinated and targeted atrocities,” Bouckaert said. “There is an urgent need for the provision of humanitarian aid and for helping the government to set up programs for reconciliation, tolerance, and justice so that Central Africans can rebuild their tattered lives.”

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Revenge of Seleka Abuses by the Anti-balaka

The widespread atrocities committed over the past 10 months by the mostly Muslim Seleka rebel group are at the root of the current violence in the Central African Republic, the group seized power in March 2013, and carried out a campaign of executions, indiscriminate killings, village burnings, and rape that plunged the country into chaos and displaced nearly a quarter of the country’s majority Christian population.

Beginning in September, the anti-balaka began to retaliate and caused much of the rural Muslim population of northwestern and southwestern Central African Republic to flock to the perceived safety of larger population centers. With the arrival of French and African forces in December and the forced resignation of Interim President Michel Djotodia in January, Seleka forces were ordered to remain in their bases, and then began retreating from Bangui and many areas of the northwest. With some assistance from Chadian peacekeepers, they began to leave those centers in January for northeastern Central African Republic. Without the Seleka in their midst, the remaining vulnerable Muslim

communities faced the wrath of anti-balaka fighters, as well as of members of the broader Christian population who had suffered greatly under Seleka rule.

The Seleka continue to commit abuses in the Central African Republic. On January 8 in Boyali, following an anti-balaka attack, Seleka fighters returned to retaliate and wreak havoc on the Christian population. The anti-balaka executed some victims on the spot and shot others while fleeing. The Seleka captured the Protestant pastor of the village, Pasteur Gabriel Yambassa, and cut his throat. They burned 961 homes in Boyali that day.

At one burned house, surviving residents said that Seleka fighters had found Claudine Serefei, 28, a pregnant, physically disabled woman unable to flee. Her relatives said that the Seleka tied her hands and feet and threw her into a fire. She was found with severe burn wounds and carried out to the bush, where the villagers had stayed to escape the Seleka killings. Human Rights Watch found her nine days later, her hands burned to stumps, shivering from pain. She was evacuated to a hospital, but died from her wounds.

Anti-balaka Structure

Human Rights Watch has documented a clear structure within the anti-balaka militias. In every region visited by Human Rights Watch during four research missions since November, local anti-balaka fighters immediately took Human Rights Watch to their leaders when asked to do so, and each anti-balaka group had its own base, military leader, secretary-general, and spokesperson. The anti-balaka movement also has a national spokesperson and military coordinator in Bangui, who have been in discussions with the interim government of President Catherine Samba-Panza about their potential role in government and integration into the army.

Anti-balaka leaders are able to coordinate the movement of their forces from one region to another, and have moved significant numbers of anti-balaka fighters to Bangui to participate in attacks against Muslim communities. Colonel Dieudonné Oranti, a founder of the anti-balaka movement, confirmed to Human Rights Watch in a January meeting that he and another anti-balaka leader had brought two groups of 300 anti-balaka fighters each to Bangui from their bases near the northern capital of Bossangoa in December to fight against the Seleka.

During the meeting with Colonel Dieudonné in the Boeing neighborhood adjacent to the capital’s airport, Human Rights Watch observed large groups of anti-balaka fighters, some armed with rocket-propelled grenade launchers and AK-47s, heading toward Muslim neighborhoods to carry out attacks. A few days later, Colonel Dieudonné called Human Rights Watch from the area of the Muslim PK12 neighborhood that had been under attack, confirming his participation in the attacks and complaining that French Sangaris forces had disarmed some of his members that morning.

Anti-balaka Statements on Removal of Muslims from the Country

In many meetings with Human Rights Watch, anti-balaka leaders have used hateful and belittling rhetoric about Muslim residents of the country, saying that all Muslims must leave the Central African Republic, and that the Central African Republic “belongs to Central Africans,” whom they define as Christians and traditionalists. Muslims are often described as “Chadians” rather than citizens by anti-balaka leaders, even though the vast majority of Muslims have citizenship.

Colonel Dieudonné denied targeting Muslim civilians directly, but admitted that his fighters had participated in the attacks on the PK 12 and PK13 Muslim community in Bangui. He told Human Rights Watch that Muslims had forfeited their right to remain in the Central African Republic by supporting the Seleka rebel movement “and selling our country to terrorists.”

He added: “I know they were born here, but they are not Central Africans because they tried to kill the Central African Republic. Would someone who loves their country try and kill their country? We the nationalists have fought for our country, we deserve to stay here.”

An anti-balaka leader in Bossembélé told Human Rights Watch that he had ordered his men to stop killing Muslims, but insisted that all Muslims must leave the country, saying, “We don’t want any more Muslims in our country.” His deputies were visibly unhappy with even that message, and two insisted that they would continue to kill Muslims. One of the deputies told Human Rights Watch: “Our hunt is not yet finished, we are not finished. We will not stop until every Muslim leaves this country. I don’t care about the consequences, and to show you I will cut the throat of a Muslim in front of you.” He then took out a big

knife and told a child soldier to go kill an ethnic Peuhl man [a Muslim] whom they had found hiding in the bush and brought to the camp. A police officer who had accompanied the Human Rights Watch team stopped the boy.

Anti-balaka leaders have also directly ordered Muslim communities to leave. On February 2, during a meeting between local civilian officials, anti-balaka leaders, and Muslim leaders in the town of Yaloké, the anti-balaka leader told the Muslim leaders that he was giving the Peuhl and any Muslim of Chadian descent 24 hours to leave the city or face attack. On February 4, Chadian Special Forces evacuated more than 2,000 remaining Muslim citizens from Yaloké for Bangui's military airport, where they were to be flown to safety in Chad.

Tactics of Intimidation and Terror

The attacks on Muslim communities have often involved shocking violence. Since late January, Human Rights Watch researchers have witnessed four public lynchings by the anti-balaka. In each case, the victim's hands were cut off, and in some cases, mutilation also included cutting off the penis and legs. When anti-balaka fighters were asked about the mutilations, they told Human Rights Watch, "We cut off the hand that killed our parents." Human Rights Watch witnessed an additional three attempted lynchings; the brutality appears in part motivated to inspire terror in the remaining Muslim population. The anti-balaka control some roads and maintain checkpoints where they inflict abuses. On January 14, at least eight Muslims – three women and five children, including one seven-month-old, fled in a truck from Boyali, a town 120 kilometers north of Bangui, and were stopped by Christian militia members stopped at a checkpoint. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the militia members hacked to death three Muslim women and three of the children with machetes on the steps of a mosque. Human Rights Watch researchers saw dried pools of blood marking where they had died. One young boy escaped and the baby survived because her mother, Fatimatu Yamsa, knowing she was about to die, handed the baby to a Christian woman for safety.

Widespread Nature of the Attacks

Bossangoa, September-December 2013

On September 5, anti-balaka fighters began a carefully coordinated offensive against five secondary trading centers around Bossangoa, attacking small Seleka bases and the

Muslim communities in Zéré, Ben Zambé, Ouham-Bac, Korom Mpoko, and Bowaye. The anti-balaka killed hundreds of Muslims and carried out deadly attacks on cattle camps run by a largely nomadic and Muslim population known as the Peuhl. The assaults led to massive displacement of Muslim residents from this regional capital. The anti-balaka attacked Bossangoa itself on December 5, leading to the further displacement of the estimated 10,000 Muslims gathered in the Boro Muslim district of Bossangoa.

During the December 5 [attack](#), anti-balaka fighters killed at least 11 unarmed Muslim residents of the Boro district. Among the dead was a young Peuhl man, Oumar Abacar, whom Human Rights Watch had just that morning taken to the hospital to treat a gunshot wound he had received when anti-balaka fighters attacked his cattle camp three weeks earlier. He was hacked to death together with his mother, who had stayed with him to look after him while he recovered from the wound.

Muslim residents of the Boro neighborhood in Bossangoa fled to a displacement camp at the nearby École Liberté [liberty school], which was heavily guarded by African Union forces. On January 30, the majority of Bossangoa's Muslims were evacuated to Chad by Chadian troops in the African Union peacekeeping mission. The remaining Muslims are awaiting evacuation to Chad.

This pattern of attacks recurred in many other areas in the country's northwest and southwest. Muslims fleeing the attacks would gather in major population centers, but then would be attacked in the larger population centers.

Bangui, January–February 2104

On January 22, following the departure of armed Seleka fighters, all the Muslim residents of the PK13 neighborhood on the outskirts of Bangui fled when the anti-balaka fighters arrived. On that day, Human Rights Watch found the remaining 36 Muslim residents of PK13, including women and children, huddled in a single compound at the entrance to the neighborhood, protected by Rwandan peacekeepers from the African Union force, known as MISCA.

A group of anti-balaka fighters in PK 13, while burning the neighborhood's main mosque, told Human Rights Watch that they would continue attacking the Muslim neighborhoods of Bangui, and that they would kill any Muslim they could. One said:

We don't have a need for Arabs in this country – they have to leave and go back to their countries because they killed so many from our families. They are foreigners anyway. They have to leave. They continue to kill in the provinces. They have to go. There are still nine Muslims here [under the protection of MISCA]. We will capture them. We will finish them off today. We will kill them. When we finish here, we will go to [the next Muslim neighborhood, PK12]. We don't want Muslims in the Central African Republic - not Chadians, and not Muslims. We will massacre them, we will kill them.

Following the flight of the Muslim population, thousands of looters, some associated with the anti-balaka but also civilians, descended on the neighborhood and began stealing from homes and stripping them of their roofs, windows, and door frames. French and African Union peacekeepers on the ground were unable to thwart the violence. As evening fell, anti-balaka fighters warned Human Rights Watch that if the 36 Muslims were not evacuated, they would be killed: "You better get them out of here, because if they remain here we will kill them in the night," an anti-balaka fighter told Human Rights Watch. Members of the French forces ultimately transferred the remaining Muslims one kilometer down the road, to the PK12 Muslim neighborhood, where thousands of other Muslim residents were waiting to be evacuated to Chad.

The same phenomenon is occurring in the remaining two Muslim neighborhoods of Bangui, Miskine, and Kilo 5, the major trading center of the capital. Day after day, heavily armed anti-balaka gunmen with AK-47s, grenades, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers arrive from their strongholds in the Boeing and Boy-Rabe neighborhoods to attack the remaining Muslim neighborhoods from their outskirts, forcing Muslim families to flee their homes and seek safety deeper into the remaining Muslim areas. As soon as families flee, looters arrive to pillage their homes and take away the doors, windows, and roofs, leaving the areas uninhabitable.

In many of the cases Human Rights Watch observed, the looters are not from the neighborhood, and in mixed Muslim-Christian areas, local Christian residents have tried in vain to protect their Muslim neighbors from the anti-balaka attacks and the looting. “We don’t loot our neighbors, we want them to stay and be safe,” said a Christian resident, who was helping a Muslim neighbor evacuate his home following the lynching of two Muslims in the mixed Gbenguewe neighborhood. “The looters are not from this area, they came with the anti-balaka to attack our Muslim neighbors and loot and destroy. We hate them for what they are doing.”

After weeks of attacks by heavily armed anti-balaka, the Muslim population has virtually abandoned Miskine, and crowds are looting and stripping down the empty homes. Much of the Muslim population of Kilo 5 is also now fleeing Bangui. On February 7, hundreds of vehicles carrying Muslim residents left in the morning, in a convoy protected by Chadian Special Forces. On February 8, thousands of Muslim residents fled Bangui in a truck convoy for Cameroon.

On a visit to Kilo 5 neighborhood on February 9, Human Rights Watch found virtually every family packing up their belongings and preparing to flee in the next convoys heading to Cameroon and Chad. The remaining residents were clearly terrorized by the violence. One resident, Ali Ousman, a 39-year-old diamond dealer, told Human Rights Watch that the attackers had lynched his mentally disabled brother, Senussi Djalé, and burned his body that morning: “My family has lived here for generations, and I have never even been to Chad, but now we have to flee for our lives,” Ousman said.

Boali, January

On January 8, hundreds of anti-balaka captured Boyali from the Seleka and began to slaughter its Muslim residents. When Human Rights Watch visited the town not long after, Red Cross volunteers were burying bodies and filling wells where corpses had been dumped during the slaughter.

One man, 25, a survivor of the Boyali massacre, told Human Rights Watch that at least 200 anti-balaka fighters had attacked Boyali on the morning of January 8, and had shot him. His older brother saved him by dragging him into a house. As the wounded man watched,

the older brother, along with the survivor's father and uncle, were hacked to death outside. Thirty-four Muslims were killed that day, including the Muslim village chief.

Boda, January–February

In the diamond trading town of Boda, 160 kilometers southwest of Bangui, on February 4, Human Rights Watch found the graves of at least 30 Muslims killed in communal violence that might have claimed as many as 75 lives. Muslim residents of the town said that the anti-balaka attack on the Muslim areas of Boda began almost immediately after Seleka forces left Boda on January 28.

The same day, local officials attempted to broker a deal between the anti-balaka fighters and the wealthy diamond-dealing Muslim traders, offering to pay the anti-balaka if they did not attack the Muslim community. The local Catholic priest also attempted to prevent an attack on the Muslim community, but at 7 a.m. on January 30, anti-balaka forces attacked the Muslim quarter, killing eight Muslims and burning down the town's main Muslim market.

The anti-balaka attack intensified on January 31, said a Muslim resident who kept a log: “The attacks from the anti-balaka intensified that day, we had 9 dead and at least 40 people went missing, their fate is unknown.” The attacks continued on February 1 and 2, with dozens more dead. Two more Muslims died on February 3, and many more were wounded.

Human Rights Watch researchers arrived in Boda on February 4, and found thousands of nomadic Peuhl and Muslim traders huddled in fear in the remaining compounds. The town's market had been burned, and Human Rights Watch found people who had suffered horrific machete and burn wounds during the anti-balaka attack. Anti-balaka fighters who carried out the attacks told Human Rights Watch that in their view all Muslims had to leave Boda. French peacekeepers intervened the next morning to stop the violence.

Mbaiki, February

Even in areas where French and African peacekeepers have deployed, they appear unable to quell anti-balaka attacks. In Mbaiki on February 4, despite the deployment of French

forces, Human Rights Watch found anti-balaka fighters threatening elderly Muslim men in the main market, running their fingers across their throats in front of the old men. On February 6, Chadian forces transferred to Bangui the entire Muslim community of Mbaiki in 20 large military trucks, carrying at least 4,000 Muslim residents of the town.

Upon arrival in Bangui, one of the main imams of Mbaiki told Human Rights Watch: “We have all left Mbaiki now. Only three or four old men stayed behind because they preferred to die in the place they have lived all their lives. We don’t know what will happen now. We are going to a country [where] we have never lived.”

Justice Needed for Lynching

New Government Should Investigate, Prosecute Army Officers

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/05/central-african-republic-justice-needed-lynching>

February 6, 2014 – Press Release

The [Central African Republic](#) government should immediately investigate and prosecute uniformed army officers who publicly lynched a man they suspected of being a Seleka fighter, Human Rights Watch said today. The extrajudicial killing and mutilation took place on February 5, 2014, immediately after the new president, Catherine Samba-Panza, addressed thousands of regrouped military officers, expressing her pride in the reconstituted army.

A few minutes after the ceremony, a group of uniformed army soldiers accused a man dressed in civilian clothes of belonging to the former Seleka rebels. The soldiers slashed the man with machetes, crushed his head with large stones, and cut off one foot and his other leg. They then put the body in the middle of the street, piled tires on it and set it alight.

“What should have been a moment of hope for the security of the Central African Republic turned into a horrific scene of bloodletting and mutilation,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), Emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. “It is absolutely essential for President Samba-Panza to condemn this act of barbarity and prosecute the attackers.”

For more than half an hour, large crowds, including children, stood and watched the body burn, filming it on their phones. When French Sangaris forces arrived at the scene, they told the crowd to disperse, and reacted with horror when a young man walked up to them holding the severed leg of the lynching victim and then threw it on the fire.

Such brutal lynchings have become a regular occurrence in Bangui, the capital, as violence in the city spins out of control. In the last two weeks, Human Rights Watch researchers have witnessed mobs carrying out two lynchings and observed three other attempts that peacekeepers prevented. In one case, the Human Rights Watch team placed their car

between a mob and its intended victim and took him to safety at a nearby Rwandan peacekeeper base.

In another lynching witnessed by Human Rights Watch on January 29, anti-balaka fighters killed two Muslim shopkeepers near the airport of Bangui and mutilated the bodies of the two men by cutting off their hands and cutting off the penis of one man and putting it in his mouth. French peacekeepers were present for more than 40 minutes at that scene, but did not intervene to protect the bodies from mutilation. After Human Rights Watch raised concerns about this failure, the commander of the Sangaris forces ordered an immediate investigation. At the lynching on February 5, French Sangaris forces did indeed act to protect the body of the victim from further mutilation.

The predominantly Muslim Seleka took power in March 2013 and engaged in a 10-month reign of human rights and humanitarian abuse. Large numbers of army soldiers fled the violence, which in many cases targeted those suspected of loyalty to the deposed president, François Bozizé. The ceremony that Samba-Panza addressed, which dignitaries, diplomats, and the commanding officers of the French Sangaris and African MISCA peacekeeping forces attended, was to induct the new army of the Central African Republic.

“The Central African Republic authorities need to call on army officers and the population loudly and frequently to stop the kind of brutality we saw on Wednesday,” Bouckaert said. “After enduring so much abuse, the country’s residents want the government to usher in peace and justice, not more violence.”

Seleka Fighters Regroup in North

Rogue Chadian Peacekeepers Facilitate Armed Leaders' Movement

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/05/central-african-republic-seleka-fighters-regroup-north>

February 5, 2014 – Press Release

(Bangui) – Armed Seleka commanders and fighters are leaving their bases in Bangui, the capital of the [Central African Republic](#), regrouping in northeastern towns, and engaging in a new wave of horrific attacks against civilians. In some cases, [Chadian](#) peacekeeping troops have facilitated the movement of armed Seleka leaders complicit in grave abuses. Seleka forces in January 2014 tortured and killed civilians in and around the town of Sibut, where the former rebels have been regrouping, Human Rights Watch said. Seleka forces were able to leave bases to which they had been confined by African Union peacekeepers by using bush roads to circumvent checkpoints or by traveling with Chadian troops in heavily armed convoys.

“If the African Union is truly going to protect civilians in the Central African Republic, it needs to rein in the rogue activities of the Chadian peacekeeping troops,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), emergencies director at Human Rights Watch. “The Chadian forces should not be enabling the Seleka to prey on civilians.”

The predominantly Muslim Seleka include numerous Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries. The African Union peacekeeping force deployed to protect civilians, known as MISCA, which officially became operational in December 2013, also includes Chadian troops. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in January 2014, following a December 2013 monitoring mission, that it had received “multiple testimonies of collusion” between some Chadian peacekeepers and Seleka forces.

The testimony included a report that on December 5 they went together, door-to-door, looking for members of the anti-balaka – Christian militias that have formed to respond to the Seleka, but often have targeted Muslim civilians – and indiscriminately killed at least 11 people. Those killed included elderly women and people who were ill or had mental disabilities, the report found.

Since December, MISCA, alongside the French force Sangaris, had worked to diminish the violence in the Central African Republic by containing the Seleka and their weapons at bases in Bangui. But in late January, Human Rights Watch documented movement by the Seleka on their own and in the company of Chadian troops, which coincided with a new wave of abuses.

The African Union should immediately suspend and investigate, with the support of the United Nations (UN), any Chadian MISCA troops credibly implicated in serious abuses, including assisting Seleka to carry out abuses, Human Rights Watch said.

The UN, regional organizations, and countries assisting MISCA should carefully review their support to ensure it does not benefit Chadian troops that either commit human rights violations or assist the Seleka in the commission of abuses.

“To be effective, peacekeepers should be impartial,” Bouckaert said. “The African Union should rigorously investigate whether Chadian peacekeeping forces are putting civilians at risk by supporting the Seleka.”

For details of new Seleka abuses, Chadian peacekeeper involvement, and background on the conflict, please see below.

Seleka Killings, Torture in the Sibut Area

On January 16, 2014, Seleka and anti-balaka fighters tried to hold a reconciliation meeting under the sponsorship of local authorities and religious leaders. Although Seleka fighters had given assurances that they would not harm the unarmed anti-balaka leaders, they executed all three of the anti-balaka representatives who attended the meeting, and then attacked the people who had come to watch the meeting, killing at least 16 more people. The Seleka fighters refused to allow local Red Cross volunteers to approach the area to bury the bodies, the last six of which were recovered on January 21.

A local official told Human Rights Watch:

They killed the three anti-balaka representatives at the meeting. They executed them and fired on everyone. They killed so many people. In

addition to the three anti-balaka representatives, there were 16 dead who were buried by their families. But there were six bodies close to their base so we couldn't go recover those until January 21. They consider everyone in Sibut to be anti-balaka.

Seleka fighters frequently fired at civilians they encountered in Sibut. On January 23 at 9 a.m., Seleka fighters shot at three men who were crossing the main bridge in town. The Seleka killed two of the men and gravely wounded 18-year-old Leono Wambiti, shattering his jaw and leg. The Seleka fighters remained in the area until 3 p.m. and left Wambiti bleeding on the bridge. When local villagers finally managed to help him, six hours after he was shot, they evacuated him to the bush, where he hid for nine days without medical treatment. He died from infected wounds on February 2, the day Seleka fighters left Sibut.

On January 28, a group of eight Seleka fighters detained 21-year-old Abraham Ngieri and two other young men, Michel Ngodji, 31, and Franku Mois, 24, in Sibut and took them to the main Seleka base, at the mayor's office in Sibut. In front of the gathered Seleka commanders, the fighters tied up the three men, tortured them, and stabbed them with knives over a five-hour period, in an effort to make them reveal the location of anti-balaka bases in the area. When it became clear that the men did not know the location of the bases, the Seleka commander of Sibut, General Rakis, ordered his soldiers to take the three men away and kill them.

Ngieri, who, despite being seriously wounded, survived this attack, told Human Rights Watch:

The zone commander himself gave the order to take us away and kill us. About nine of them took us in a 4x4 blue pickup. We were still tied up, in the arbatasher way [with arms and legs tied behind the back], and they took us to a house a few kilometers from town. Then they stabbed us again, and put the house on fire over our heads. I only managed to escape because the ropes burned and I was able to free myself, but the others burned to death.

On January 29, Seleka fighters on patrol in the Isolé district of Sibut went from home to home searching for men to abduct. They entered the house of Arsène Datunu, 30, who was looking after his four children while his wife was at the market, and took him and his

brother Gongéré Datunu from the house, as well as a third man from the area. They took the three men, tied them in the arbatasher style, and took them to a village five kilometers north of Sibut, where they executed the men, leaving their bodies behind.

Seleka Atrocities on the Bangui-Sibut Road

In late January, an estimated 500 armed Seleka fighters and commanders left Camp Kassai in Bangui on foot. They abducted civilians in the area and forced them to carry Seleka munitions and luggage. As they made their way north, the fighters attacked civilians in villages by the road.

On the night of January 29, Seleka fighters arrived in the village of Pata, 60 kilometers north of Bangui. They captured nine men in the village and took them to the main road. The fighters executed four of the men on the main road and then left with the other five. The next day, villagers at Vangué, about 50 kilometers from Pata, found the executed bodies of the five other men in a banana grove, right next to where a Seleka truck had broken down a week earlier. Anti-balaka forces had looted the truck. The Seleka appeared to have committed the killings in retaliation for the looting.

On February 1, the Seleka column passed near Damara, 80 miles north of Bangui, and engaged in heavy fire exchanges with local anti-balaka fighters. During this incident, some of the civilians who had been abducted were able to escape.

One man, 50, a cook at a popular Bangui restaurant, and his son, 24, were among those abducted by the Seleka leaving Bangui. They described to Human Rights Watch near Damara how they and others had been forced to carry heavy loads of munitions and luggage for the Seleka fighters. On the sixth day, the Seleka fighters summarily executed two of the other abducted civilians who were too exhausted to continue to carry their loads.

“They were shot together,” the man told Human Rights Watch: “They sat down because they had become too exhausted. The fighters ordered them to get up and they couldn’t anymore, so they just shot them.” On February 1, at the village of Ngupe, the Seleka shot dead four people in the community who were trying to flee, according to the two witnesses.

Chadian Troops Assist Seleka Leaders

On January 26, at 4:30 p.m., Human Rights Watch researchers witnessed and filmed a heavily armed convoy of Chadian peacekeeping troops about 60 kilometers north of Bangui. The convoy included at least eight pick-up trucks carrying Seleka fighters including some leaders, such as General Mahamat Bahr, the head of military intelligence for the Seleka, whom Human Rights Watch had met the day before he fled.

On January 31, General Bahr contacted Human Rights Watch by phone to say that he had traveled with the Chadian peacekeeping convoy to Bossangoa, a key town in the country's northwest. The Chadians were to relieve peacekeeping troops from the [Republic of Congo](#) who had been stationed in Bossangoa for months. Upon taking over peacekeeping responsibilities in Bossangoa, the Chadian troops allowed another Seleka leader, Colonel Saleh Zabadi, to leave with his troops from their base, where they were ordered to remain, and to go with General Bahr and other Seleka commanders to the northern cities of Sibut, Kaga Bandoro, and Kabo, where Seleka leaders were regrouping with their forces.

In a December 2013 report, "[They Came to Kill.](#)" Human Rights Watch documented how Colonel Zabadi, then the Bossangoa deputy commander, ordered the drowning on November 18 of seven farmers who were wrongfully accused of being anti-balaka militiamen. The farmers were bound and thrown into the Ouham River; three survived. Human Rights Watch met with Zabadi and Bahr in December to confront them with the evidence and warn them they could be held criminally responsible for such crimes.

MISCA, which has a mandate to protect civilians, has worked to stabilize the Central African Republic by ordering Seleka fighters to remain on their bases and by trying to prohibit them from circulating with weapons. An official with the peacekeeping force told Human Rights Watch that the Chadians were operating outside of its command and mandate by providing escorts to armed Seleka leaders.

Background on the Conflict

The mostly Muslim Seleka forces, who seized power in March 2013, have been responsible for massive human rights abuses documented by Human Rights Watch, including massacres, rapes, executions, torture, and the burning of hundreds of villages. As a direct result of the Seleka's widespread abuses, nearly a fifth of the country's people have fled

their homes, living in dire humanitarian conditions in the bush or camps for displaced persons.

In September, the mostly Christian anti-balaka militias began fighting back, and over the past two months have intensified revenge attacks on Muslim communities, with massacres, executions, torture, and the widespread burning and looting of Muslim homes, plunging the country deeper into bloodshed. Fearing these atrocities, Muslim residents have fled numerous northwestern towns, such as Bossangoa and Bouca, where there was once a significant and longstanding Muslim presence.

In January 2014, Michel Djotodia, the former Seleka leader appointed president in August 2013, stepped down from power at a summit in Ndjamen, Chad, where the transitional national council for the Central African Republic met to begin the process of choosing a new interim president. Catherine Samba-Panza, the former mayor of Bangui, was sworn in on January 23, 2014. She inherits a very weak government, humanitarian crisis, and ongoing conflict with regional implications.

Discovering Beauty Amid the Carnage

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/05/dispatches-discovering-beauty-amid-carnage>

February 5, 2014 – Dispatch

Amid all the carnage, killing, and looting that is tearing apart the Central African Republic, the photographer Jerome Delay stumbled upon an unexpected scene yesterday: a home being looted in the Miskine neighborhood of Bangui surrounded by piles of photo negatives and muddied prints. Curious, he went to investigate further, and froze as he realized what he had found. Scattered all around him was the life's work of one of Africa's most famous photographers, Samuel Fosso.

Fosso is a legend in the world of photography, particularly known for his thoughtful self-portraits reconstructing iconic moments in African and African-American history. Fosso – who is in France – has photographed himself as Kwame Nkrumah, Africa's first post-independence president; as Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King delivering speeches; as Muhammad Ali in boxing gloves; as Bob Marley with dreadlocks; and in countless other historic moments. His work is a profound and beautiful exploration of the African and African-American experience.

For many months now, my colleague Marcus Bleasdale and I have been documenting and publicizing the horrific crimes being committed in the Central African Republic. It has been exhausting and heartbreakin work. Today, we did something different and spent hours trying to save something of beauty – Fosso's irreplaceable archives.

As we arrived, looters were literally taking down the roof of Fosso's house, while his housekeeper was trying desperately to keep the looters away. Fosso's beloved cameras and furniture were already gone. Young men with grenades were walking around us. Occasionally, French and African peacekeepers entered the neighborhood and fired in the air to disperse the looters, but they usually quickly returned as the peacekeepers were leaving.

A lifetime of negatives was scattered around the house and spread on the ground by looters looking for things of value. The irony, of course, was that some of the signed and numbered prints at our feet could fetch thousands of dollars at auction, while the looters were preoccupied with taking metal sheeting from the roof. We spent hours putting the negatives and prints in boxes, twice filling up our pickup truck to take Fosso's priceless work to safety. The looters found it very amusing to see white people – who they took to be looting – get in on the game.

When we contacted Samuel Fosso on the phone in France to tell him that we had tried to save what we could from his archive, he was elated. He told us that the loss of his cameras was painful, but that his archives, a lifetime of work and memories, meant everything to him.

In the Central African Republic's descent into ever-greater violence, it is not only lives and communities that are being destroyed. As in other conflicts, the very cultural heritage of a nation and a continent is at risk. After months of contending with soul-crushing evil, it was a relief and pleasure to save the work of a very special photographer and to embrace its beauty and humanity.

Riptide

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/31/riptide-central-african-republic>

January 31, 2014 – Op-ed Published in *Foreign Policy*

The death records at 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. On really bad days, the records of names and causes of death just stop; only the number of dead is documented before the bodies are buried in mass graves.

The morgue only hints at the deadly toll of communal violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) that has raged for months, claimed tens of thousands of lives, and displaced even more. Recently, the Seleka, a predominately Muslim group of fighters that seized Bangui, the capital, and toppled the CAR's government in early 2013, has lost strength and some ground, though the group continues to terrorize wherever possible. In response, Christian forces known as anti-*balaka* ("machete" in Sango, the local language) have stepped up attacks against Muslim civilians in places where the Seleka fighters no longer hold the sway they did just a few months ago.

In hopes of quelling the situation, international peacekeeping forces are now in the country. A new president, [Catherine Samba-Panza](#) -- a former mayor of Bangui, nicknamed "Madame Courage" -- was also installed in mid-January, in what must be one of the most unwanted jobs on Earth. But the violence continues unabated. On Jan. 29, two Muslim men were [hacked to death](#) and their bodies brutally mutilated near Bangui's international airport as onlookers cheered and filmed the scene.

The story of Boyali, a small town roughly 200 miles northwest of the capital, illustrates the horrific developments in the CAR. On Jan. 14, [Fatimatu Yamsa](#), a Muslim woman, was in a truck that was stopped by Christian militia members at a checkpoint in Boyali. Knowing she was about to die, she handed her 7-month-old baby to a Christian woman next to her. The baby was saved, but Yamsa was killed with machetes along with two other Muslim

women and their four children on the steps of a mosque. When I visited the mosque, dried pools of blood outside marked where they had died.

This massacre was just the latest chapter in a series of awful tit-for-tat violence in Boyali. A few days prior, hundreds of anti-balaka had captured Boyali from the Seleka and began to slaughter the town's Muslim residents. When I arrived in the town not long after, Red Cross volunteers were burying bodies and filling in wells where corpses had been dumped, leaving the water unusable for drinking.

In a camp for displaced Muslims on the outskirts of Bangui, I found Dairu Soba, 25, with a festering gunshot wound to his knee. He told me he had been shot when a few hundred anti-balaka fighters had attacked Boyali on the morning of Jan. 8. Dairu's older brother, Dibrila, had saved him by dragging him into a house. As Dairu watched, Dibrila, along with his father and uncle, were hacked to death outside. Thirty-four Muslims were killed that day, including the village chief.

The same day, Seleka fighters returned to Boyali to retaliate and wreak havoc on the Christian population. Some victims were executed on the spot; others were shot while fleeing. The Seleka captured the Protestant pastor of the village, Gabriel Yambassa, and cut his throat. The Seleka burned 961 homes in the town.

At one burned house, surviving residents said, Seleka fighters had found Claudine Serefei, 28, a pregnant, physically disabled woman unable to flee. They had tied her hands and feet and thrown her into a fire. Now she lay before us, her hands burned to stumps, and she was shivering from pain.

The massacres in Boyali are indicative of the Seleka's waning power; the group is on the defensive more than ever before, its attacks increasingly ones of terrible retaliation. The tide began to turn against the Seleka in September, when anti-balaka started attacking poorly protected Seleka positions in smaller trading towns in the CAR's northeast, indiscriminately killing Muslim residents. The French intervened in early December, just as the country descended into even greater bloodshed, with up to 1,000 killed in Bangui over the course of just a few days. One month later, the Seleka's self-appointed president, Michel Djotodia, was forced from power by regional and international powers.

Djotodia [fled to exile](#) in Benin, and once-strutting Seleka generals now fear for their lives; they want to escape unscathed, while also avoiding justice for their crimes. In some cases, they are rushing into exile, some reportedly with the help of African peacekeepers. As one Seleka official told me, "Now, it is every officer for himself. We are all trying to find our own way out of here."

* * *

Meanwhile, Muslim communities are left behind to face the wrath of the anti-balaka, and the anger of some Christian civilians. Since December, in particular, in community after community, Muslim men, women, and children have been mercilessly killed. In an interview, Col. Dieudonné Oranti, one of the founders of the anti-balaka movement, claimed his men don't kill civilians. He then launched into a long tirade against Muslims, saying that they had betrayed their country and sold it to terrorists, so they no longer belonged in its borders.

In Bangui, entire Muslim neighborhoods face threats to their existence. On Jan. 28, residents fled or were chased out of the PK13 neighborhood by hundreds of anti-balaka fighters. Homes were systematically looted and dismantled. The main mosque was destroyed by a crowd of machete-wielding fighters, declaring things like, "We do not want any more Muslims in our country. We will finish them all off. This country belongs to the Christians."

In another Muslim neighborhood, PK12, many residents who have survived massacres are preparing for the long, hazardous journey to refuge; their destination is Chad -- hundreds of miles to the north. For those who have chosen to stay, tensions are at a boiling point. After a Muslim man was recently lynched, anti-balaka fighters opened fire on his funeral with automatic weapons. French troops arrived, belatedly, and the mass of enraged Muslims then began protesting against them. One of the Muslims was killed by the French soldiers; another was wounded. Then the anger turned on those of us documenting the scene. A menacing crowd shouted that it was whites who had done the killing and it was time for us to leave. As we made our way out, a Christian worker ran for his life past us, chased by a Muslim mob.

The arrival of French forces in late 2013 was initially met with optimism. They joined African troops already on the ground, some of whom view what is happening in the Central African Republic as deeply personal. A commander of Rwandan troops representing the African Union (AU) peacekeeping force told me recently, "What we see here reminds us of what we experienced in Rwanda in 1994, and we are absolutely determined not to let 1994 happen again."

Yet the wave of anti-Muslim violence unleashed by the anti-balaka -- and the Seleka's responses -- has proved difficult to contain. Simply put, the underequipped AU troops and the 1,600 French troops are insufficient in number to halt the bloodshed. Only a U.N. peacekeeping mission with some 6,000 to 10,000 soldiers would have a chance to stop the killings and stabilize the country. Such a mission would also bring police to patrol the streets, human rights monitors to report on the situation, and a political component that could help re-establish order. But whether that will come soon, or at all, is unclear.

* * *

Pastor Koudougeret, a Baptist priest in the capital, is now looking after the orphaned baby of Yamsa, the woman killed at a mosque in Boyali. He vigorously shook his head when I asked him whether there was a religious war unfolding in the country. "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 said, "They treat the country as their private money-making business. We need a real democracy with politicians who have a vision to look after the needs of everyone."

In the face of devastation, there are small signs of hope. For some in the majority-Christian population, the decline of the Seleka has meant a winding down of the terror that forced them to flee their homes in 2013. Villages that were completely abandoned in December are slowly returning to life. Destroyed homes are being rebuilt.

Unexpected bonds are also being formed, with people showing courage amid the carnage. In the northern town of Boyali, Father Xavier-Arnauld Fagba brought more than 700 Muslims who were under attack to safety at his Catholic Church in mid-January. He held Sunday Mass, surrounded by the belongings of Muslims, including Qurans he had brought

inside for safekeeping. He led his followers outside to extend handshakes of peace with their Muslim neighbors.

"We cannot be silent and cower in the face of injustice, but must have courage," he preached. "To be a Christian is not just about being baptized, and true Christians live a life of love and reconciliation, not bloodshed."

“We Will Take our Revenge”

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/28/dispatches-central-african-republic-we-will-take-our-revenge>

January 28, 2014 – Dispatch

Fatimatu Yamsa knew that her desperate attempt to flee the slaughter all around her had failed as soon as she saw the Christian anti-balaka militia at a roadblock. Fatimatu was on a truck in Boyali, about 100 kilometers northwest of Bangui, capital of the [Central African Republic](#). Knowing she was about to die, Fatimatu pleaded with the Christian woman next to her to take her seven-month-old baby and pretend it was the woman’s own.

“If you make it to the next town, ask for the Yamsa family, and give them my baby,” Fatimatu pleaded in desperation as she was ordered to descend from the vehicle.

The baby was saved, but Fatimatu was not. As the truck drove off, she and two other Muslim women and their four children were ordered by the anti-balaka fighters to go into the mosque. One eleven-year-old boy made a desperate dash for freedom and escaped. Fatimatu and the others were hacked to death with machetes on January 14. Dried pools of blood outside the mosque still mark where they had been. When I visited a few days ago, local villagers looked away in shame, and children played inside the abandoned mosque.

In this little-known country in the middle of Africa, a spree of killing is taking place. When the mostly Muslim Seleka overthrew the former president, François Bozizé, in March 2013, effective governance of the Central African Republic ceased to exist. Fiefdoms sprang up, ruled by Seleka leaders, some of whom had come from Chad and Sudan. They ruled through absolute terror, burning hundreds of villages and firing randomly on the terrified mostly Christian population whenever they encountered them. Although nominally disbanded in September 2013, the Seleka continued to terrorize civilians for several more months. A predominantly Christian group, the anti-balaka, then began to contest Seleka violence with its own abuses.

The Seleka's self-appointed president, Michel Djotodia, was forced from power by the international community on January 10, 2014, and fled to exile in Benin. On a daily basis, many other Seleka leaders are fleeing, having realized that the game is over for them. General Isa, the former head of presidential security for the Seleka, told me: "Now, it is every officer for himself. We are all trying to find our own way out of here."

In the aftermath of their flight, Muslim communities are facing the wrath of the Christian anti-balaka militia, originally created by Bozizé to fight banditry but now reformed to fight the Seleka, and the majority Christian civilians who suffered such terror for the last ten months. In town after town, the Muslim population, consisting of traders and nomadic, ethnic Peuhl cattle herders, have been attacked and massacred, their homes and mosques destroyed.

Last Wednesday, immediately after the Seleka fled the Muslim neighborhood of PK13 in Bangui, hundreds of anti-balaka fighters arrived, chasing away the remaining inhabitants, who fled to the relative safety of Rwandan peacekeepers at the scene. All around us, homes were being systematically looted and dismantled in an atmosphere of euphoric destruction. The main mosque was dismantled by a crowd of machete-wielding fighters who told us: "We do not want any more Muslims in our country. We will finish them all off, this country belongs to the Christians."

I pleaded with the anti-balaka fighters to leave the PK13 residents alone, but they showed no sign of mercy, telling me: "You get them out of here, or they will all be dead by morning. We will take our revenge."

The death records of the Bangui morgue read like a chapter from Dante's Inferno, page after page of people tortured, lynched, shot, or burned to death. The smell of rotting corpses is overwhelming, as when people die in such numbers, it is impossible to bury them immediately. On really bad days, the recording of the dead just stops: no names are recorded, just the numbers of dead. In the 15 minutes we managed to remain amid the stench and horror, two more bodies arrived: A Muslim hacked to death with machetes, and a Christian shot dead by the Seleka.

The French Sangaris troops, who are disarming the Seleka, often seem reluctant to intervene and told me they cannot take sides, even when Muslims, now unarmed, are

killed in revenge attacks by the anti-balaka. The less well-equipped African Union MISCA troops, particularly those from Rwanda, Burundi, and the Republic of Congo, are playing a more active role. A commander of the Rwandan troops told me that their intervention in the Central African Republic crisis is deeply personal for him and his troops: “What we see here reminds us of what we experienced in Rwanda in 1994,” he told me, “and we are absolutely determined not to let 1994 happen again.” Despite their collective efforts, peacekeeping troops on the ground are completely overwhelmed, and [a United Nations peacekeeping mission is needed to stop the killings.](#)

There are some small signs of hope. For the majority Christian population, the departure of the Seleka has meant an end to the terror that forced them to flee into the bush, and villages that were completely abandoned last month are slowly returning to life, destroyed homes being rebuilt.

In Boali, another town, Father Xavier-Arnauld Fagba personally brought more than 700 Muslims in his town who were under attack to safety at his Catholic church last week. On Sunday, he preached love and reconciliation to his followers, and led them outside to extend handshakes of peace with their Muslim neighbors. “We cannot be silent and cower in the face of injustice, but must have courage,” he preached. “To be a Christian is not just about being baptized, and true Christians live a life of love and reconciliation, not bloodshed.”

After all of the bloodshed we have witnessed here, I listened, fighting back tears, and hoped that his message would be heard.

Human Rights Watch World Report 2014: Central African Republic

<http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/central-african-republic>

January 21, 2014 – Country Chapter

A rebel coalition known as the Seleka took control of Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), on March 24, 2013, forcing out the former president, François Bozizé. A transitional government was established, and Michel Djotodia was formally named interim president in April. New elections were scheduled for early 2015.

Rebels belonging to the Seleka, which means “alliance” in Sango, the national language, engaged in widespread human rights abuses, particularly killing civilians indiscriminately. These killings, both in Bangui and outside the capital, were often followed by widespread looting and pillaging, leaving sections of an already-poor population homeless and destitute.

Djotodia denied that Seleka fighters committed abuses, initially blaming the violence on Bozizé loyalists, “false Seleka,” or bandits. On September 13, he dissolved the Seleka as a group. However, members of the Seleka continue to kill with impunity and the central government does not appear to be in total control of the Seleka.

Armed groups originally created by Bozizé to fight banditry, the *anti-balaka* (“anti-machete”), clashed with the Seleka in late 2013. Violence and insecurity took on an alarming sectarian dimension, as the anti-balaka, who are predominantly Christian and include some soldiers who served under Bozizé in the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), attacked Muslim civilians around Bossangoa, the capital of Ouham province, in response to Seleka abuses, mostly against Christian civilians.

The dire security situation hampered the delivery of humanitarian aid and Seleka fighters intimidated and harassed journalists and civil society activists.

An African Union (AU)-led peacekeeping force, the International Support Mission in Central Africa (AFISM-CAR) has requested financial, logistical, and technical support from the

international community, but as of October 31 had only 2,589 of the 3,500 personnel requested.

Seleka Abuses

The Seleka was created in late 2012 out of three main rebel factions, primarily from CAR's impoverished north. The group called for more political inclusiveness and an end to the marginalization of the predominantly Muslim northern region. The Seleka includes fighters from Chad and Sudan, and it has recruited child soldiers.

The group launched an offensive in December 2012 and swiftly moved toward the capital, capturing towns along the way. A peace agreement was reached with the government in January, but was soon ignored by both parties, as the rebels advanced on Bangui, forcing former President Bozizé to flee. Along the way towards the capital, they destroyed numerous rural villages, looted homes, and raped women and girls.

After taking power, the Seleka killed scores of civilians who were trying to flee attacks. In some villages, every single structure was at least partially burned. The destruction was often accompanied by pillaging, leaving civilian populations utterly destitute.

Many villagers, forced to abandon their homes, are living in extremely difficult conditions in the bush. Lacking humanitarian support, numerous people have died of illness, injuries, or exposure to the elements. International humanitarian agencies have been able to provide limited support to only a few affected areas. Governmental and nongovernmental health services were systematically targeted, and destroyed or closed.

In Bangui, the Seleka looted entire neighborhoods as they took control of the city. Areas such as Damala, Boy-Rabe, Kasai, and Walingba saw wanton attacks and scores of civilians killed. Boy-Rabe, in particular, has been routinely ransacked by the Seleka. Government officials claimed that these were disarmament operations.

Fighting escalated in September around Bossangoa in the north. Hundreds of people have been killed and numerous communities have been burned to the ground. The anti-balaka groups have singled out Muslim communities for attack, as they are perceived to be allied with the Seleka.

Almost all of the abuses have been carried out with complete impunity. A small number of alleged Seleka perpetrators have been arrested and some prosecutions initiated against them, but the judicial system remains severely hampered and trials, at time of writing, had yet to commence. The functioning of the government, especially in the rural areas, has been seriously disrupted and limited by the coup, with many administrative buildings destroyed.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

The situation for displaced people is bordering on catastrophic because of their limited access to humanitarian assistance. In September 2013, the United Nations reported that about 170,000 people fled intense fighting in the north around Bossangoa. Most were left to fend for themselves in the bush, but about 36,000 found refuge in the compound of a Catholic church and at a local school in Bossangoa. The number of internally displaced persons stands at about 400,000. Almost 65,000 CAR refugees were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other neighboring countries.

Commission of Inquiry

On May 22, a presidential decree established a national commission of inquiry to investigate human rights violations committed since 2002 and to identify the persons most responsible for these crimes. The commission, comprising judges, human rights defenders, and police officers, is also tasked with identifying individual victims and assessing levels of damage for eventual compensation.

The commission was initially incapable of doing its work due to a lack of funding, but in September it received technical assistance and vehicles from the government to conduct investigations. Some civil society actors have questioned the ability of a national commission to achieve results and have called for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry.

The International Criminal Court

CAR first accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2001, when it became a state party to the Rome Statute. On December 22, 2004, the government went one step further and referred the situation in the country to the ICC prosecutor, after a

Bangui court of appeals ruled that domestic courts were unable to prosecute grave international crimes effectively. In 2007, the ICC opened an investigation into crimes committed during the 2002-2003 civil war. The investigation has so far led to only one case, that of Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, a Congolese national and former vice-president of the DRC. Bemba and his Movement for Liberation of Congo forces were invited to CAR in 2002 by then-President Ange-Félix Patassé to support resistance of a coup attempt by Bozizé. Bemba is currently on trial at the ICC for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda continues to monitor developments in the country and has indicated that she may exercise jurisdiction over more recent crimes. She issued public statements on April 22 and August 7, warning those responsible for recent abuses that their crimes may fall under the ICC's jurisdiction and that her office would investigate and prosecute those most responsible for committing serious crimes "if necessary."

Peacekeeping Forces

In March, while trying to protect the Bozizé government, 13 soldiers of the South African Defence Force were killed outside of Bangui by Seleka forces. The soldiers were there under a bilateral arrangement between Bozizé and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa.

Also unable to stop the Seleka were the Multinational Forces for Central Africa (FOMAC), regional peacekeepers deployed in CAR through an agreement signed in late 2007 with the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) under the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX). In April, ECCAS decided to deploy an additional 2,000 troops to support MICOPAX.

In August, MICOPAX was transitioned into the AU-led AFISM-CAR. Most of the requested 3,500 troops will be made up of contingents that were already serving in MICOPAX. The mandate of AFISM-CAR includes civilian protection and the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance. As of October 31, 2013, AFISM-CAR had roughly 2,589 of the 3,500 requested peacekeepers on the ground.

French troops, meanwhile, maintain control over the international airport in Bangui.

Key International Actors

The international response to the Seleka takeover was initially regional. In December 2012, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) called on the Seleka to halt its advance on Bangui. In January, a power-sharing agreement brokered by ECCAS was signed between the Seleka and the Bozizé government, but was ignored by both sides. When the Seleka took Bangui in March, the ECCAS turned its focus to supporting and augmenting the FOMAC presence.

Ivan Simonovic, the assistant secretary-general for human rights at the United Nations, visited CAR from July 29 to August 2. In an August 14 report to the UN Security Council (Security Council), he stated that the current conflict “was marked by an unprecedented level of violence, looting and destruction” and that the Seleka were committing the most “serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law.”

In October, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution strongly condemning the widespread human rights and humanitarian law violations, notably by “Seleka elements,” strengthening the UN’s mandate to monitor and report on human rights abuses on the ground, and demanding safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid.

John Ging, the UN’s operations director for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, said in November after a visit to CAR that he was “very concerned that the seeds of a genocide are being sown.”

In mid-November the secretary-general presented the Security Council with options for international support to the African peacekeeping force and the potential creation of a UN peacekeeping force. The Security Council was expected to pass an additional resolution toward the end of the year.

United Nations Human Rights Council: Special Session on the Human Rights Situation in the Central African Republic

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/20/united-nations-human-rights-council-special-session-human-rights-situation-central-a>

January 20, 2014 – Statement

Since the Seleka rebel coalition seized power in March 2013, the Central African Republic has been in the grip of a grave human rights and humanitarian crisis. Human Rights Watch, since April 2013, has documented widespread burning and pillaging of villages, extrajudicial executions, rape, and the recruitment of children as soldiers by Seleka forces. In August 2013, Christian anti-balaka militia, in an attempt to seize power and retaliate against the predominantly Muslim Seleka, began to target Muslim residents, whom they accused of supporting the Seleka. Human Rights Watch has investigated the cycle of sectarian violence since then.

In early December, the anti-balaka launched large-scale attacks on Seleka forces in Bangui and Bossangoa, killing both Seleka and Muslim civilians. In turn, heavily armed Seleka exacted revenge on Christian civilians. By January 10, Interim President Michel Djotodia resigned; Seleka members and Muslim civilians now face greater vulnerability to attack. Muslim residents have fled rural areas to gather in provincial capitals and secondary trading towns, but these locales are now also under threat.

Anti-balaka, for example, reportedly massacred some 30-40 ethnic Peuhl residents just 10 days ago in Boyali, a trading center 140km north of Bangui. There were also reports of widespread Seleka reprisals and village burnings in Bozoum. In Bangui, according to OCHA, roughly 350,000 people, about half the city's population, have been displaced by sectarian fighting. People across the country are living in dire conditions in makeshift camps without basic shelter, food, water, and medical supplies. Hundreds of thousands are hiding in the bush, an unknown number dying of preventable diseases, hunger, and exposure. Aid agencies are unable to reach many of these desperate people.

The African Union and French peacekeeping forces (MISCA) have brought some degree of civilian protection, but lack sufficient capacity to contain the human rights and humanitarian disaster in the Central African Republic. As has already been envisaged in the Security Council resolution, the United Nations should step in. Rapid support for the UN Secretary-General proposal to transform the AU force into a full-fledged multi-dimensional UN mission would be the best option for re-establishing CAR's stability and protecting civilians.

We are concerned by reports that Chadian troops, as part of MISCA, are involved in human rights violations and clashes against demonstrators. This was flagged in the recent High Commissioner's report, the result of a December field mission by OHCHR staff. The UN should fully and urgently investigate such reports and take measures to prevent any future abuse. The report also highlights the very serious human rights crisis in CAR, and the need for more comprehensive monitoring of the abuses being committed.

The holding of this special session and the early nomination of the Independent Expert are positive steps. The Independent Expert will need to work with all parties to ensure the immediate cessation of attacks on civilians, forced displacement, the destruction or looting of civilian property, and the killing or mistreatment of individuals in custody. The Council should support the work of the Expert and ensure that it continues to send an unequivocal message to all parties that there will be no impunity for crimes committed against the civilian population.

This Time, the UN Can't Let Africa Fail

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/07/time-un-can-t-let-africa-fail>

January 7, 2014 – Op-ed Published in Bloomberg

Until recently, thousands of people escaping violence in the Central African Republic at least could find refuge in the capital, Bangui. I was one of them. I had been in the northern town of Bouca where a massacre of civilians sheltering in a church compound was narrowly averted by the arrival of African Union troops. And so I was grateful, days later, to reach the relative safety of Bangui.

Now the violence has reached the capital, which has become frighteningly dangerous. Roughly 350,000 people, about half the city's population, have been displaced by sectarian fighting between the largely Muslim Seleka coalition, which took power in a March 2013 coup, and the anti-balaka ("anti-machete") militias of the country's majority Christians, backed by soldiers of the former government. Attacks have become more gruesome, with civilians often targeted.

People across the country are living in dire conditions in makeshift camps without basic shelter, food, water and medical supplies. Hundreds of thousands are hiding in the bush, an unknown number dying of preventable diseases, hunger and exposure. Aid agencies are unable to reach many of these desperate people.

African Union and French peacekeeping forces are the lid on the boiling kettle, but aren't ideally suited to contain this human rights and humanitarian disaster. In the absence of a political process to re-establish a stable government, the United Nations should step in. The African Union troops, a presence in the Central African Republic since late 2007, have increased their number since the new violence began to about 4,000 and are scheduled to grow to 6,000. They have secured some population centers, but lack the equipment and personnel necessary to prevent the country from imploding. Moreover, their neutrality has been compromised by the presence of Chadian soldiers; the Seleka forces include large numbers of Chadians.

The arrival in Bangui of additional French troops in early December was a welcome development, but their role also underscores the difficulty of restoring stability. In trying to disarm the Seleka, the 1,600 French peacekeepers run the risk of giving a military advantage to the anti-balaka forces, which aren't easily disarmed because they use guerrilla tactics and blend in with the population.

The best option for addressing the challenge of the Central African Republic is to take up UN Secretary-General [Ban Ki-moon's proposal](#) to transform the AU force into a full-fledged UN mission of 6,000 to 9,000 peacekeepers. Such a force would be better able to protect civilians and create an environment in which humanitarian assistance could be delivered. With secure financing from the UN, and working under the peacekeeping standards set out in the UN Charter, the force would be more professional than AU troops, who rely on voluntary donations by donor countries.

A UN force would have better arms and equipment as well as logistical and communications capacities -- and would be less likely to be involved in incidents such as the exchange of fire in December in Bangui between Chadian and Burundian AU peacekeepers. Safeguards to remove soldiers with abusive records would be put in place. UN peacekeepers would have the long-term commitment French troops lack, giving them an advantage in neutralizing the anti-balaka forces, an effort that will require understanding the militias' command structure.

A [UN mission](#) would also come with civilian expertise to help rebuild the country, which the AU doesn't possess. The French recently brought stability to [Mali](#), but they don't have the mandate, funding or political capital to remain in the Central African Republic to address both the short-term emergency and the longer-term challenges. They need support to rescue what is becoming a failed state.

UN experts could monitor and report on human rights violations and help re-establish the judicial system, disarm and reintegrate combatants, and reconstitute the security forces. The Central African Republic's civilian administration has been utterly destroyed. Without UN assistance to attain some degree of state authority, the idea of holding national elections in early 2015, as the UN proposes, is implausible.

UN peacekeeping missions are hardly perfect solutions. They have a mixed track record, cost more than AU forces and sometimes last longer than they are needed. But they've scored recent successes. In the [Democratic Republic](#) of the Congo, they helped rid the eastern part of the country of a highly abusive, Rwandan-backed rebellion. In the [Ivory Coast](#), they helped end the repressive rule of [Laurent Gbagbo](#) and install a democratically elected president. In the Central African Republic, they offer the best chance of a return from the edge of the abyss.

Rwanda's Moment at the UN: Lead the Way, Call for Action in the CAR

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/21/rwanda-s-moment-un-lead-way-call-action-car>

December 21, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The East African*

Former US President Bill Clinton's failure to act to prevent the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 continues to plague the conscience of many American policy makers.

Perhaps acknowledging this shortcoming, President Barack Obama declared in an address at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum that "preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States."

This moral responsibility, however, is not America's alone. African nations need to play a more active role to protect civilians at grave risk.

The crisis in the Central African Republic is a good example. The situation is different from Rwanda's in 1994, but like Rwanda, it has the potential to deteriorate rapidly and claim many lives.

Rwanda is in a good position to press publicly for strong action, though: It has both the legitimacy to do so, and the ability to make its voice heard as a member of the United Nations Security Council.

I was in CAR several times this year, researching the crisis for Human Rights Watch. Since the Seleka rebel coalition overthrew François Bozizé's government on March 24, the country has been rapidly descending into anarchy. The Seleka, predominantly Muslim, installed Michel Djotodia as interim president; elections are scheduled for early 2015. However, the Seleka's rule has been marked by chaos and grave human rights abuses. In April, dozens of people who told me how the Seleka had entered their neighbourhoods in Bangui, shooting women and children and looting homes and businesses. In May and June, I travelled outside the capital and saw how the Seleka had laid entire villages to waste.

In late August, threatened residents began to fight back. Local defence groups — commonly referred to as anti-balaka (“anti-machete”)— started making loose alliances with former soldiers from Bozizé’s national army.

In November, armed groups on both sides had escalated the violence to a level previously unseen in the country. The anti-balaka, equating all Muslims with the Seleka, are targeting civilians. The Seleka, in revenge, have intensified attacks on Christian villagers.

I met Christians who told me how Muslims they had grown up with had led revenge attacks by the Seleka against their own neighbours. This is the kind of talk that should make any Rwandan’s blood run cold. People “looking” like members of a certain group. Neighbours facilitating the killing of neighbours.

The situation in CAR has worsened in the past two weeks: At least 500 people were killed in Bangui in fresh fighting in early December. Several hundred others were killed in the vicinity of Bossangoa, 300 kilometres to the north.

Human Rights Watch team on the ground has confirmed that armed groups have been killing people with machetes. These groups have destroyed mosques as well.

The African Union, with French support, has a peacekeeping force on the ground, risking their lives to protect civilians. One wonders how different Rwanda’s tragic history might have been had African peacekeepers shown up in force in 1994. Our team in Bossangoa saw first-hand how AU peacekeepers from the Republic of Congo acted to protect both Christian and Muslim civilians, putting themselves at great risk.

CAR is a large country, roughly 24 times the size of Rwanda, and the AU has fewer than 4,000 peacekeepers there to provide security. The AU needs more peacekeepers and more support. Thankfully, the international wheels of action have started to move.

On December 12, Burundian troops started to fly to Bangui with US logistical support. A few days later, Obama said the US would send \$60 million to support the AU force. In addition to its vital assistance to the current AU peacekeeping force, Rwanda should support the growing international push for a well-equipped and resourced UN force to provide sufficient security to allow people to come out of the bush and restart their lives.

Rwanda could also encourage mediation and reconciliation initiatives between Christians and Muslims.

Through its seat on the UN Security Council, Rwanda supported the creation of a commission of inquiry to investigate rampant abuses and report back to the Security Council in six months. This is a positive and significant step, but more is needed.

Rwanda's recent past, as well as its experience in African peacekeeping missions, puts the country in a unique position to keep up the pressure on other UN Security Council members. If some countries drag their feet, Rwanda should show the necessary leadership or the Central African Republic's inter-communal violence could spiral out of control.

The UN crossed its arms in 1994 and left Rwanda to its fate. The same should not be allowed to happen in the Central African Republic. Rwanda has the floor. It has the power and legitimacy to make people listen.

The Central African Republic Facing its R2P Moment of Truth

Author: Philippe Bolopion, United Nations Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/20/central-african-republic-facing-its-r2p-moment-truth>

December 20, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *OpenGlobalRights/OpenDemocracy*

The world is finally starting to pay attention to the tragedy unfolding in the [Central African Republic](#), a landlocked country of 4.6 million people in the heart of Africa, and one of the most impoverished places on Earth. With hundreds of people killed in the capital city Bangui last week, and the conflict taking a dangerous sectarian turn, the handling of the CAR crisis will certainly become a test case for R2P advocates.

This time, 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 a recent report to the Security Council. 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 he was “very concerned that the seeds of genocide are being sown.”

R2P was developed to address such explosive situations before it is too late. And yet, strikingly, in discussing the Central African Republic, advocates of greater international involvement and most policy makers shy away from invoking R2P. Even the French government, which justified its military intervention in Libya or Ivory Coast in R2P terms, is staying clear of invoking the norm.

Is this a sign that R2P is losing its relevance? Has the norm become so controversial as to become unusable? There is no question that [NATO's intervention in Libya](#) -- by stretching to the limits what was permissible under an R2P framework -- did lasting damage. Similarly, the abysmal failure of the international community to address the mass killing of Syrian civilians begs the question – if R2P does nothing for Syrians, what good is it?

Yet, predicting a demise of R2P on this basis would miss a crucial element. Although not explicitly invoked, the ideas underlying R2P are implicitly infusing much of the current thinking on how to avert the worst in the Central African Republic; a sign perhaps that far from being irrelevant, R2P has gone mainstream. The wider acceptance of R2P in fact helps explain why a forgotten country, with neither natural resources nor any real strategic interest, is slowly earning a spot at the center of the world's attention.

The current crisis started in March, when predominantly Muslim armed groups from the north, called the Seleka ("alliance"), staged a violent offensive, ousting president François Bozizé from power, and installing in the capital city Bangui one of its leaders, Michel Djotodia – the first Muslim president of this majority-Christian nation.

With no discernible political or religious agenda, and as documented in our September report [*"I Can Still Smell the Dead:" The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic*](#), the Seleka have raped, pillaged and burned, killing scores of women, children and elderly. While Muslim communities were not always spared, the Seleka have been particularly vicious toward Christian civilians.

Seleka abuses contributed to the resurgence of mostly Christian militias known as the "anti-balaka" ("anti-machete"), comprising poorly armed civilians backed by a few former military personnel still loyal to Bozizé. While they claim to protect their villages against Seleka attacks, many have retaliated against defenseless Muslim civilians with the same cruelty and brutality.

During a research mission in northern Central African Republic last month, I talked to Massadou Bichefou, a Muslim herder, age 55, who told me he had hidden in tall grass while an anti-balaka man armed with a knife slit the throat of each of his 11 children and grandchildren and then his two wives. In a village called Votovo, survivors described to me how several dozen anti-balaka men arrived in late September and forced all the Muslims out of their houses, separating the men and boys from the women and younger kids, while shouting that they would "exterminate all the Muslims." They slit the throat of one of the men, and shot three more people, including a 13-year-old boy, before the other male residents escaped. Survivors told me that when the remaining men came back after nightfall, 21 women and children were missing. Their houses were burned, and only the heads of their dead cattle were left on the ground.

This cycle of violence has already claimed many lives, but as bad as they are, things could get much worse.

In a country on the brink of anarchy, where the few remaining state institutions have been taken over by men installed in power through force, and whose fighters are implicated in serious abuses, R2P's primary reliance on the state to protect its own civilians means little. What, then, is the international community to do?

For now, the plan is to deploy a force of 6,000 troops under the umbrella of the African Union- sanctioned mission (MISCA), which is authorized to take all necessary measures to protect civilians, under UN Security Council resolution 2127, unanimously adopted on December 5. The resolution also tasks the French troops now in the country to assist MISCA.

MISCA is scheduled to take over for and incorporate 2,600 poorly equipped troops who are already on the ground as part of a regional peacekeeping mission called MICOPAX, sponsored by the Economic Community of Central African States. While the deployment of MICOPAX was aimed at securing Bangui and preventing the worst violence, the peacekeepers are not up to the challenges now facing the country.

While on the ground, we rarely saw them patrol insecure roads or near vulnerable communities. In Bossangoa, in the North, even if at times they showed great courage under fire, we also saw them being pushed around by Seleka fighters in flip flops, and selling beer or providing private security to businesses to make extra money. Of course, until a better force can be deployed, these regional mechanisms need all the support they can get, including with equipment, logistics and financing. The US has already committed 40 million USD and logistical assistance, and the EU has pledged "significant financial assistance."

The French, realizing that MISCA can't do the job, have already bumped up their presence from 1,200 to 1,600 soldiers. They might be persuaded to do more. While this will definitely help MISCA improve its efforts to protect civilians, it's a short-term solution to a long-term issue.

In the longer term, a force of 6,000 to 9,000 UN blue helmets, as proposed by Ban Ki-moon, and deployed with a strong mandate to protect civilians, would help bring back a measure of security in the country. It would allow tens of thousands of people – who now live in fear in unsanitary camps, or deep in the bush where malaria is rampant – to go back home and rebuild their lives. Such a mission would also come with the civilian expertise necessary to rebuild the state administration and justice mechanisms, as well as help support elections and conduct human rights monitoring.

Deploying such a mission takes time, at least six months, so Security Council members should waste no time in authorizing it. So far, the US has been reluctant to authorize another costly UN mission. With CAR presenting little strategic interest to Council members, other than the potential of regional destabilization caused by another failed state, there has been little pressure to act. But the absence of perceived hidden agendas could make this a “purer” form of R2P intervention.

The language of responsibility of states to protect their citizens has become commonplace in Security Council statements. But when states fail to meet their responsibility R2P language has rarely been turned into R2P action. And as President Obama said, “preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.”

Early warning has worked in CAR; the international community has awakened to this “forgotten crisis.” What remains is the responsibility to protect the country’s terrorized civilians.

Sectarian Atrocities Escalate

Hundreds Killed in Violence in North Targeting Muslims, Christians

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/18/central-african-republic-sectarian-atrocities-escalate>

December 19, 2013 – Press Release

(Nairobi) – Christian militias responding to rampant abuses by Muslim armed groups have committed atrocities against Muslim communities in northern [Central African Republic](#), Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Concerned countries should immediately bolster the African Union peacekeeping force in the country and support efforts by France to protect civilians, Human Rights Watch said.

The 43-page report, [“They Came To Kill”: Escalating Atrocities in the Central African Republic,](#) based on weeks of field research in Ouham province, documents the surge in violence by Christian anti-balaka (“anti-machete”) militias since September 2013. The anti-balaka have killed several hundred Muslims, burned their homes, and stolen their cattle. So-called ex-Seleka forces, former members of the predominantly Muslim rebel alliance that overthrew the government in March, retaliated against Christians with the apparent knowledge of their commanders.

“The brutal killings in the Central African Republic are creating a cycle of murder and reprisal that threatens to spin out of control,” said [Peter Bouckaert](#), emergencies director at Human Rights Watch and author of the report. “The UN Security Council needs to act quickly to bring this evolving catastrophe to a halt.”

Anti-balaka militias, comprising local vigilantes and soldiers loyal to the previous government, carried out coordinated attacks in September against Muslim communities and ex-Seleka outposts near Bossangoa, the Ouham provincial capital. While the anti-balaka describe themselves as self-defense forces aiming to protect their own villages, their actions and rhetoric are often violently anti-Muslim.

Many of the attacks by the anti-balaka involved shocking brutality: a Muslim nomadic cattle herder told Human Rights Watch she was forced to watch as anti-balaka fighters cut

the throats of her three-year-old son, two boys, ages 10 and 14, and an adult relative – all the Muslim males in the cattle camp. A man tearfully described escaping from anti-balaka attackers, only to watch in horror from a hiding place as they proceeded to cut the throats of his two wives, his 10 children and a grandchild, as well as other Muslims they had captured.

A Muslim woman told Human Rights Watch that she was outside cooking at 5 a.m. when the anti-balaka came and attacked their home: “They began to cut my husband with their machetes on his side and his back, and cut his throat. After they killed him, they set our house on fire, and threw his body on the fire, together with my son’s. They ordered my 13-year-old boy to come outside and lie down, and then cut him two times with a machete and killed him.”

Following the anti-balaka attacks, the ex-Seleka forces in Ouham province retreated to Bossangoa, where they wreaked revenge on Christian residents, killing many and setting fire to their homes. They also attacked Christian farmers working in their fields.

The ex-Seleka revenge killings appear to have had the backing of senior commanders in Bossangoa, Human Rights Watch said. On November 18, the Bossangoa deputy commander, Colonel Saleh Zabadi, in the presence of his superior and a dozen officers, ordered the drowning of seven farmers who were wrongfully accused of being anti-balaka militia. The farmers were bound and thrown into the Ouham River; just three survived.

Serious abuses are continuing both in the north and in Bangui, Human Rights Watch said. On December 5, anti-balaka forces shot or slit the throats of at least 11 Muslim [civilians](#) in Bossangoa’s Boro district during their brief control of the town. An anti-balaka attack on Bangui and resulting violence left 400 to 500 Muslims and Christians dead. These recent killings, however, are only a fraction of the serious abuses against civilians since Seleka took power in [March](#).

French peacekeepers in the country have conducted operations in Bangui and Bossangoa to bring an end to the killings, including disarming fighters on both sides.

The recent violence in the north has created a humanitarian crisis, Human Rights Watch said. Both sides have burned down large swathes of villages in Ouham province. Some 40,000 displaced Christians have sought refuge at the Catholic church in Bossangoa,

while 4,000 Muslims remain on the opposite side of town. Humanitarian relief workers have found it difficult to provide assistance, particularly emergency medical aid, as aid workers have also been the targets of attacks.

The Security Council should immediately authorize a UN peacekeeping mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, Human Rights Watch said. It should have a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.

“Urgent support for peacekeeping in the Central African Republic is crucial to bring stability to a tense situation, protect the population from abuses, and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those at grave risk,” Bouckaert said. “The potential for further mass violence is shockingly high.”

Amnesty International will release a briefing paper documenting atrocities in Bangui, Central African Republic, on December 19, 2013 and a longer report in 2014.

A Massacre on Hold in the Central African Republic

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/16/massacre-hold-central-african-republic>

December 16, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The Independent*

It was late afternoon when a pick-up truck carrying Colonel Ismael Hadjarou and a dozen of his heavily-armed Seleka soldiers pulled up outside a church in the town of Bouca, in northern Central Africa Republic. I watched as they jumped from their vehicle and quickly fanned out to surround the church, blocking off the only exit.

Inside the building, 3,000 civilians were hiding in silent terror. Colonel Hadjarou stepped into the church and began to address the cowering, wide-eyed crowd. The Colonel spoke briefly, and delivered his simple but chilling message: “If there are still people here at 8am tomorrow, we will shoot them down and we will burn the mission.”

I happened to be in Bouca that day to investigate the destruction of hundreds of homes and dozens of civilian killings, and stumbled upon this scene by chance. As I stepped forward to ask what was happening, a Seleka fighter lifted his gun at me. I stopped in my tracks, but instantly knew there was no way I could leave. I spent the next two days at the church, working frantically with colleagues from humanitarian groups to try to prevent an atrocity from unfolding.

Massacres like the one threatened in Bouca are happening all over the Central African Republic (CAR). But only recently has the world started to take note. Journalists, who just a few weeks ago would have struggled to place CAR on a map, have poured into the country to cover the recent flurry of violence that’s gripped both the capital Bangui and other provinces.

Since seizing power in March, the Seleka, a mostly Muslim alliance of rebel groups, have indiscriminately killed scores of civilians, engaged in rampant looting, and burned countless villages to the ground. Michel Djotodia, the rebel leader who formally became president in August, officially disbanded the Seleka in September; they are now widely referred to as ex-Seleka and are nominally integrated into the national army.

But local armed groups known as the anti-balaka then began to rise up against the Seleka. The anti-balaka (literally ‘anti-machete’) have indiscriminately attacked and killed Muslim civilians, equating all Muslims with the Seleka. Despite a history of Muslims and Christians living together peacefully in CAR, the anti-balaka told me first-hand that all Muslims must die.

To those of us who have been closely following CAR's conflict month by bloody month, it's clear the crisis has reached tipping point. Violence across the country is increasing, but the level of brutality is rising too. Civilians are burned alive in their homes; children's throats are slit. Both sides share responsibility for these abuses.

Last weekend alone, up to 500 people were killed in Bangui; extra French troops were flown in to help restore law and order. But despite the grave loss of life, there is one ray of hope: the international community is finally paying attention to CAR and is acting rapidly. The United States, a country with hitherto no interest in CAR outside helping to track down the notorious Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony in the south-east, has quickly stepped up to the plate. It announced this week that it would help airlift African Union (AU) peacekeepers into the country from elsewhere on the continent, and will also release funds to support the AU mission. France was quick to fly in extra troops when it became clear the scale of the slaughter was about to spiral, and has provided enormous support to the AU, whose troops are trying to prevent mass killings. The world's diplomats are actively considering a UN peacekeeping force, and human rights monitors are about to be deployed.

The UK has commendably recognised that a humanitarian disaster is unfolding in CAR. But it can and should do more to urgently help protect civilians. It should support the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force. CAR is a country larger than France; the African Union peacekeepers are stretched thin and cannot be everywhere at once.

Britain should also offer logistical support to AU and French forces, securing access for aid workers to assist the hundreds of thousands of people forced from their homes. It should provide medical facilities to support the AU and French missions. It should make all parties in CAR aware that they will be held accountable for their crimes. And it should call for targeted individual sanctions on those orchestrating the abuses.

Happily for the 3,000 Christians I saw crammed into the church back in Bouca, after two days of intense negotiations, AU soldiers finally arrived in the town, before Colonel Hadjarou could make good on his threat.

Seeing the relieved civilians at Bouca's church compound, I couldn't help but think about the many communities suffering in silence in the Central African Republic – those out of reach of peacekeepers. Who is going to protect these people? And who will bear witness to the next massacre?

Face to Face With Colonel Zabadi

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/11/face-face-colonel-zabadi>

December 11, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The New York Times*

BANGUI, Central African Republic — Col. Saleh Zabadi, a commander of the alliance of rebel forces that seized control of much of this country in March, is widely feared for his ruthlessness.

I recently sat down with three men who had barely survived an encounter with him. They were among seven Christian men captured by fighters from the rebel alliance, which is mostly Muslim, on Nov. 18 while returning from selling produce at a market outside of the town of Bossangoa.

Tied up and beaten, the men were brought to Colonel Zabadi and his commander, Gen. Issa Yahya (who died last week in fighting in Bangui, the capital). 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 that the men be killed by drowning. Four of them died. The three who escaped told us their story.

The Central African Republic, a landlocked country of 4.5 million, most of whom are Christian, has been torn by fighting between the rebel alliance known as Seleka (or ex-Seleka, as they have been nominally integrated into the army) and the mainly Christian anti-balaka ("anti-machete") fighters, who have carried out revenge attacks against the Muslim rebels who control the capital.

A few days ago, the photographer Marcus Bleasdale and I accepted an invitation to meet Colonel Zabadi in Bossangoa, about 300 kilometers north of Bangui.

The night before, Gen. Mahamat Bahar, another rebel commander, had arrived in Bossangoa. He'd been sent by President Michel Djotodia to assess the dire situation in the area, where hundreds of people have been killed and thousands of others have been uprooted. He was clearly shaken by the journey, having been attacked four times on the

road by Christian fighters. (He was not wounded.) General Bahar showed us, on his cellphone, a video clip of a Muslim village chief being burned alive during a Christian militia attack in September.

We, too, had been documenting attacks by the anti-balaka fighters and had spent the last few days investigating the killings of Muslim civilians a short distance away. One of them was a young, wounded cattle herder murdered hours after we talked to him at a hospital where he was being treated.

Colonel Zabadi and his men listened attentively for a half hour as an interpreter relayed, in Arabic, our description of the violence against Muslims. But then it came time to discuss the numerous atrocities committed by his men.

We relayed this account from one Christian eyewitness: “Every day, they murder farmers going to their fields. They hunt them like animals, hiding in the bush to ambush them. Just yesterday, they shot dead a mother by the river, and they left her body with her baby crying next to her.”

I also told Colonel Zabadi that we knew about the drowning of the Christian traders: “I know it was you who gave those orders, because some of the men survived.”

The whole group seemed to tense up. General Bahar took out a towel to wipe the sweat pouring off his face.

I opened my backpack and unfolded a dozen large printouts, generated by satellite imagery, of villages Colonel Zabadi and his men had burned to the ground. I told them: “All those red dots are the houses you’ve 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 told him that this was direct evidence that could be used against him at the International Criminal Court, which prosecutes war crimes and crimes against humanity.

There was silence all around us.

We observed that the situation had changed since French peacekeeping forces, operating under the auspices of the United Nations, had arrived. Over the past few days, French warplanes had repeatedly flown over Bossangoa to put the armed groups on notice. Those

planes were delivering a message to the rebels, I said: Rule by the gun and you will end up in The Hague, or treat the population properly and rule through respect.

Cornered, Colonel Zabadi didn't deny our accusations. He said he wanted to mount joint patrols with the regional peacekeepers to encourage local Christians to come home. We pointed out that, if this were going to happen, he had to order his men to stop killing those who were displaced.

Our meeting ended cordially, to my surprise and relief. General Bahar promised to take our message back to the president in Bangui.

The next day, we returned unannounced to the Seleka base, to inform the commanders that African peacekeepers had begun to disarm the Christian militias fighting them. We found General Bahar and Colonel Zabadi in a heated discussion with other Seleka commanders and regularly heard the words "human rights" evoked (in Arabic). General Bahar ordered the fighters to stay in their barracks, hand over their weapons, and ask permission before going anywhere. He ended by saying, "This is our last chance." Whether they obeyed him, time will tell.

Tragedy at the Imam's House

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/07/dispatches-car-tragedy-imams-house>

December 7, 2013 – Dispatch

On Thursday morning, the photographer Marcus Bleasdale and I went to see the imam of Bossangoa, [Central African Republic](#) (CAR), at his home in the Muslim Boro district of the town. The situation in Bossangoa was tense as word spread of heavy fighting in the capital, Bangui, between the mostly Muslim ex-Seleka forces that now rule the country, and the Christian anti-balaka militias backed by defecting soldiers still loyal to the president ousted in March, Francois Bozizé.

At the imam's house, we met Oumar Abacar, a 26-year-old, bone-thin ethnic Peuhl nomad with a badly infected gunshot wound to his knee, barely able to stand. He told us that he had been staying at a nomad cattle camp north of Bossangoa when it was attacked by anti-balaka militias. "I was out in the bush with my two children," he said in a voice barely louder than a whisper. "And the anti-balaka came and shot me twice with their homemade guns. They then left me there for dead." On the way to Bossangoa, the anti-balaka attacked them several more times.

Worried about his wound, we offered to take Oumar to the local hospital for treatment and a course of antibiotics. He was hesitant, fearful to travel into the Christian areas of Bossangoa, and worried about the rising tensions in the town. His mother told him to go, and said she'd stay around to look after him before they returned to the nomad camp several kilometers away.

Oumar smiled and gave us a big thumbs up when he had his wound bandaged and got his medications. When we took him back to the imam's house around 2 p.m., we noticed many of the shops were closing. As we were leaving, heavily armed Seleka fighters came flooding in on their pickup trucks, and we knew things were about to get dicey. By the time we reached the base of the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC) peacekeepers just a few kilometers away, everyone was running in terror for safety, and gunshots and explosions were happening everywhere. We and hundreds of frightened

civilians had to hunker down at the FOMAC base for hours as anti-balaka and ex-Seleka fighters fought for control of the city, and FOMAC desperately tried to protect the civilian population from the fighting and sectarian massacres.

Yesterday, as soon as we could move safely, we went to find out what had happened in the Boro district during Thursday's fighting. We found the Muslim quarter deserted and partly burned, its entire population of some 7,000 residents and previously displaced Muslims sheltering at the nearby Ecole Liberté, heavily protected by FOMAC troops and the ex-Seleka fighters.

When we found the imam again, this man who had already seen so much was too traumatized to speak coherently, and kept hiding his head in his hands. His friends told us the story of the tragedy that had unfolded, keeping their voices down to avoid traumatizing those mourning their dead just next to us.

When the Christian anti-balaka fighters launched a surprise attack on the Muslim Boro district at 2 p.m. on Thursday – right after we had left the area – many residents had run to the imam's house to seek safety. The anti-balaka fighters backed by well-armed army defectors proceeded to hack to death those who couldn't escape. Eleven people were killed outside the house, including five women.

We joined in the mourning. One of the men lowered his head, unable to make eye contact and whispered something that hit me like a punch in the stomach: "We're sorry, but the two Peuhl you brought, the young man and his mother, they also were slaughtered." With his badly wounded knee, Oumar stood no chance of escaping.

Another old man arrived, and everyone stopped to say a prayer to the dead as he sat sobbing in their midst. I recognized the new arrival as a wealthy Muslim trader, Gara Iné, whom I had met last month after his cattle camp had been attacked by the anti-balaka, who had killed four Peuhl cow herders and stolen his 680 cows. He had introduced us to the Peuhl women who had witnessed the attack, and who had described to us how the attackers had killed all the men in the camp, cutting the throats of one woman's 3-year-old son, two teenage boys aged 10 and 14, and the other woman's husband.

Now, more tragedy had befallen Gara. His wife, Khadija, 35, and his brother-in-law Adei Abacar, 38, were among those whom the anti-balaka had hacked to death with machetes outside the imam's house. Khadija's elderly mother, Hamida Oumar, was in critical condition at the local hospital, with severe machete wounds to her head. We offered our condolences to Gara, remembering how he had kindly hosted us on our previous visit. As we walked back to our car in silence, we found a young Muslim boy, Zakaria, with his arm in a sling – we had briefly run into him that same morning at the hospital, when we had seen the Seleka fighters come to collect the body of one of the nine ex-Seleka fighters killed in Thursday's fighting. Zakaria had another horror story. He told us that he had been inside his home in the Muslim district when anti-balaka fighters and heavily armed army defectors burst in and shot him in the shoulder and arm, leaving him for dead on the floor. As he lay there unconscious, the attackers looted his family's home and then the thatch roof on fire. The heat from the fire made him regain consciousness, and he had managed to escape just in time.

The gruesome events in Boro district of Bossangoa present only one small segment of a much broader tragedy that has been unfolding in the Central African Republic. Since overthrowing the government in March, Seleka forces, an alliance of predominantly Muslim armed groups, have ruled through the gun and with terror, attacking and burning down Christian villages, killing and wounding untold numbers of people. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes in fear, creating a humanitarian crisis.

Future atrocities are in the making. On Friday morning, after anti-balaka militias had chased his forces from much of Bossangoa, Seleka commander Colonel Saleh took his regrouped fighters to the outskirts of the Catholic Church camp that housed some 35,000 displaced Christians. His men then fired several rocket propelled grenades into the crowded camp, and repeatedly threatened to attack it unless the anti-balaka left Bossangoa. Hoping to avoid a massacre, the African peacekeepers negotiated an end to the crisis and got the anti-balaka to stand down, knowing that Colonel Saleh would have no second thoughts about launching a full-out attack on 35,000 civilians.

With between 400 to 500 dead in similarly brutal clashes and massacres since Wednesday in Bangui, where many of the corpses still laying uncollected in the streets, little doubt

remains that the Central African Republic stands on the precipice of ever-widening sectarian bloodshed. France knows how critical the situation has become, sending hundreds of additional French troops to the country to provide civilian protection, but it is still struggling to find support for a broader international stabilization force for the country under United Nations command. No French troops have yet arrived in Bossangoa. There is no more time to be wasted to avert a disaster.

African Peacekeepers to the Rescue

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/05/dispatches-african-peacekeepers-rescue>

December 5, 2013 – Dispatch

Just last month, it seemed that the African peacekeeping troops in Bossangoa, [Central African Republic](#), did little more than turn a profit selling cold beers to the local population. But today, those same troops courageously came to the rescue of people caught in an intense battle for control of this city, 300 kilometers north of the capital, Bangui. The day started tense, as we woke up to news of heavy clashes in Bangui between the predominantly Muslim ex-Seleka forces who have ruled the country since March, and the mainly Christian anti-balaka (“anti-machete”) fighters seeking to overthrow them. Dozens were killed. The news soon spread that the ex-Seleka commander of Bossangoa, General Yaya, was among those killed in the Bangui fighting.

The tension was palpable.

Fighting erupted in Bossangoa at about 2 p.m. We were in the Muslim quarter helping a wounded massacre survivor when carloads of heavily armed ex-Seleka fighters arrived, ready for battle. Together with hundreds of civilians, we rushed to the relative safety of the base used by the Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC). Unusually, the peacekeepers kept their doors open. All too often in the past, African and UN peacekeeping troops have done little or nothing to protect nearby civilians from armed attack, closing the doors of their bases and leaving people to their fate when the bullets start flying.

As the fighting intensified, the FOMAC commander, Captain Wilson from the Republic of Congo, rallied his peacekeeping troops with remarkable speed and courage, deploying them around town to safeguard the tens of thousands of displaced people at the Catholic church and at other sites around town.

When I informed him most humanitarian workers were stuck at a compound on the front line of the fighting, he ordered his troops to the scene without hesitation, evacuating the workers just in time.

For hours, FOMAC peacekeepers deployed amidst the heavy fighting acted to keep the combatants away from vulnerable civilians. As the town fell to the anti-balaka fighters, Captain Wilson ordered his troops to cordon off the Muslim quarter, to prevent reprisal killings by the Christian militias. One of the FOMAC peacekeepers was gravely wounded in the chest during the fighting.

With fighting in many parts of the Central African Republic, the dangers faced by the civilian population will only increase. Sadly, tomorrow we will be counting the dead from today's heavy fighting.

But the courageous actions of Captain Wilson and his African peacekeepers give some hope that their effort – expanded into a larger United Nations peacekeeping mission – can effectively protect the civilian population.

Preventing Atrocities in the Central African Republic

Author: Philippe Bolopion, United Nations Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/28/preventing-atrocities-central-african-republic>

November 28, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The Washington Post*

No matter how often one interviews victims of human rights abuses, there are times when people's images stay with you.

This month, in northern [Central African Republic](#), I met an elderly Muslim herder who described in painful detail how a militia member slit the throat of each of his 11 children and grandchildren, ages 6 months to 25 years, before also killing his two wives. He struggled with tears while trying to spell the long list of names. He had lost everything. On the steps of a church that has become the center of a squalid camp of more than 35,000 people seeking refuge from violence, a young woman was trying to nurse an infant who had been struck in the arm by a bullet that killed the woman's husband. No matter how hard she tried, the mother was helpless to comfort her baby.

These are two facets of the tragedy unfolding in this landlocked country of 4.6 million people. The Central African Republic is one of the poorest places on Earth, with mostly underexploited resources and no real strategic interest. However, it is beginning to grab international headlines and could soon stain our collective conscience if the [sectarian killings and counter-killings engulfing many towns](#) and villages are allowed to expand to the whole country.

The violence started in March, when predominantly Muslim armed groups from the north, called the Seleka ("alliance"), staged a ruthless rebellion and installed one of its leaders, Michel Djotodia, as the first Muslim president of this majority-Christian nation.

Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) how, all the way to power and since, the Seleka has killed, raped, pillaged and burned. Its victims include scores of women, children and the elderly. While Muslim communities were not always spared, the Seleka has proved particularly merciless toward Christians and their churches.

A conflict that had more to do with predation and power than with religion took an ugly, sectarian turn in September, when Christian militias known as “anti-balaka” (“anti-machete”) started attacking Muslim communities, slitting the throats of women and children and at times announcing that they wanted to exterminate all the Muslims.

These attacks have often provoked brutal Seleka reprisals. Last week, Human Rights Watch saw [a Seleka commander ask “loyal Muslim” villagers](#) to donate fuel and money so his men could fight the anti-balaka in a neighboring town. When we finally got access to the area, it had been laid to waste.

Learning from past mistakes, the United Nations is raising the alarm. John Ging, operations director for the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, went to the Central African Republic this month. He said afterward that he was very “concerned that the [seeds of a genocide are being sown](#).” There is also a small but growing chorus of concerned voices in the United States, including members of Congress.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon believes that a force of 6,000 to 9,000 U.N. peacekeepers could help bring the Central African Republic back from the brink. With the right equipment and leadership, they would protect civilians from the ill-equipped Seleka and anti-balaka and allow the tens of thousands in unsanitary camps around churches or hiding deep in the bush to return to their villages and rebuild their lives.

The United Nations could also bring civilian experts who could help with administration, justice, human rights and elections, in addition to supplementing the small U.N. team there. They could help rebuild the Central African Republic and reduce the risk of it becoming a failed state that is a haven for armed groups. The relentlessly abusive Lord’s Resistance Army is known to be active in the country’s southeast. The Obama administration has deployed [a small number of Special Operations forces](#) to the region to bolster efforts to apprehend that group’s leaders.

U.S. support is necessary for a U.N. peacekeeping mission, but the Obama administration has been reluctant to back one, arguing that the current force of 2,500 poorly equipped but cheaper African Union peacekeepers can do the job once they reach their full strength of 3,600.

Until the United Nations can take over — which would take months — the African peacekeepers need all the help they can get. With the help of close to a thousand French troops announced to reinforce them, they might be able to keep the situation from spiraling out of control a bit longer. But in a country the size of Texas, they will never be able to protect the population or ensure stability.

President Obama would need to explain to Americans why support for another U.N. mission, in a country most have never heard of, is so important. [The recent U.S. contribution of \\$40 million](#) for the African Union peacekeepers and millions more for humanitarian assistance helps, but it is insufficient. [In September, Obama emphatically said](#), “I have made it clear that, even when America’s core interests are not directly threatened, we stand ready to do our part to prevent mass atrocities and protect basic human rights.” It’s time to show that he means it.

What a War Crime Looks Like from Space

Author: Josh Lyons, Satellite Imagery Analyst at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/26/dispatches-what-war-crime-looks-space>

November 26, 2013 – Dispatch

The tell-tale signs of a devastating attack are obvious – even via satellite.

Satellite images of the remote, gold mining village of Camp Bangui in the Central African Republic show dozens of black “burn scars” – all that is left of more than 200 homes reduced to ashes following a November 10 attack by former Seleka fighters who have been wreaking havoc in the region.

The images, recorded the morning of November 23, 2013, show large portions of the village have been burnt to the ground likely by arson, leaving more 235 buildings – around half the village - destroyed. The commanding officer during the attack on Camp Bangui, [General Abdallah Hamat](#), told Human Rights Watch that only four homes were burned during fighting.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Satellite-Based Damage Assessment for the Village of Camp Bangui, Central African Republic

Satellite image recorded on the morning of November 23, 2013

Summary of main findings: Approximately 235 destroyed buildings were identified within the village of Camp Bangui, based on an analysis of a very high resolution satellite image recorded on the morning of 23 November 2013. Virtually all affected buildings exhibit damage signatures fully consistent with fire, including the presence of burn scars, destroyed trees as well as intact load-bearing walls without a roof. Approximately 48% of village buildings have likely been destroyed with the highest concentrations in the central and southern portions of the village. It is likely that a small percent of destroyed or severely damaged buildings have not been identified because of tree cover. Actual damages are therefore likely to be higher.

November 23, 2013 November 23, 2013 – with 235 destroyed buildings marked in red

Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch; Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A; Image Copyright: CNES 2013; Source: Astrium.
Village Coordinates: 5.660N 16.990E

Because of overhanging tree cover, it is likely that a small percent of destroyed or severely damaged buildings have not been identified suggesting that actual damages are likely to be even higher than the satellite images indicate.

Camp Bangui is accessible only on foot or motorcycle through a narrow dirt road. It is so remote it can't be found on maps so Human Rights Watch established its location by taking the GPS coordinates of the village during an on-site inspection after the attack. It had been laid to waste.

The attack on Camp Bangui violates international humanitarian law which prohibits attacks against civilians and destruction and looting of civilian property. Those who ordered or carried out the attacks are responsible for war crimes.

Human Rights Watch has already collected detailed satellite evidence of arson attacks on 15 additional villages and towns across the Central African Republic and will be actively monitoring the conflict in the weeks and months to come.

As the [conflict escalates](#) within the [Central African Republic](#), leaving scores of villages burned to ground and hundreds of thousands of civilians displaced, Human Rights Watch is actively documenting major human rights abuses and war crimes on the ground and via satellite imagery.

Human Rights Watch researchers have [documented](#) first hand the destruction of villages by former Seleka rebel fighters, recently nominally integrated into the national army. Punitive raids by the ex-Seleka against predominantly Christian villages have been followed by revenge attacks against Muslims, marking a dangerous new sectarian dimension to the conflict.

Because of the scale of the conflict and lack of access to many remote villages, Human Rights Watch is using satellite imagery to monitor reports of new village attacks and to provide detailed figures on destroyed buildings across the conflict-affected areas of the country.

Satellite-Based Damage Assessment for the Village of Camp Bangui, Central African Republic

Satellite image recorded on the morning of November 23, 2013

Intact, likely undamaged buildings within Camp Bangui are concentrated in the northwestern section of the village



Almost all buildings along the main road in the center of Camp Bangui have been destroyed

Destroyed buildings and fire burn scars visible as dark patches within the village.

Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch; Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A; Image Copyright: CNES 2013; Source: Astrium.

Village Coordinates: 5.660N 16.990E

Satellite-Based Damage Assessment for the Village of Camp Bangui, Central African Republic

Satellite image recorded on the morning of November 23, 2013

Primary route leading south to Gaga (20km)



Artisanal gold mines located along stream bed 250 meters north of village

Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch; Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A; Image Copyright: CNES 2013; Source: Astrium.

Village Coordinates: 5.660N 16.990E

My Meeting with the General

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/25/dispatches-my-meeting-general>

November 25, 2013 – Dispatch

My meeting with Gen. Abdallah Hamat began, surreally, with a big hug. He is a large man, one who fills out both his military uniform and the smart suit he was wearing that day. His embrace is tight and genuine. The meeting on November 15 in the capital of the Central African Republic, Bangui, however, was anything but a social occasion. I was there to ask difficult questions, ones that could implicate the general in war crimes.

It was not the first time I laid eyes on the general. Five days earlier, I watched Hamat rally his men, ex-Seleka fighters now nominally serving in the national army, in the small town of Gaga before they attacked the village of Camp Bangui. He had already taken motorcycles from local drivers to transport his men, but he was having a hard time with fuel. He called out to an amassed crowd, “Are there no loyal Muslims here to donate fuel so we can fight the enemy?” The vendors quietly started to back away, but out of either fear or obligation, some contributed.

By the next day, rumors of burned villages and dead civilians started to filter out. On November 14, my interpreter and I took a four-hour motorbike ride on a small path and eventually arrived close to Camp Bangui. We could smell the corpses before we even arrived at the village. One young man lay dead on the trail. The village had been laid to waste. I quickly counted scores of burned homes. A casserole with food still in it rested on a burned-out cooking fire, the chair next to it overturned. Rarely does one get such intimate glimpses of the moment when a person runs for their life.

We managed to find a few people who were hiding on the outskirts of the abandoned village. They confirmed that the ex-Seleka had entered shooting at whomever they could find. The people I met had found a few more bodies in the streets, but nobody knew the real death toll. It was too dangerous to stay around and count. The final toll might never be known.

For the past six months, Human Rights Watch has been writing about the atrocities being perpetrated by the ex-Seleka, a predominantly [Muslim coalition that took power](#) in the Central African Republic on March 24, 2013. The Camp Bangui attack was the first time that I witnessed in the Central African Republic blatant command responsibility in human rights abuses.

So, when I spoke with the general, he told me that his forces at Camp Bangui had engaged the enemy, the anti-balaka, predominantly Christian armed groups retaliating against [ex-Seleka abuses](#).

Only four houses had been damaged in the fighting, he told me. “I saw this with my own eyes,” he said. The assault, Hamat maintained, was a “humanitarian intervention” that would allow residents to return to their homes safely, now that the anti-balaka had been neutralized.

The [attack on Camp Bangui](#) violates the laws of war, which prohibit attacks against civilians and the destruction and looting of civilian property. Those who order such attacks are responsible for war crimes. The general’s niceties don’t change that.

Residents of CAR have borne the brunt of this increasingly sectarian-tinged conflict between the ex-Seleka and anti-balaka. Ending the human rights abuses against civilians – who have lost countless loved ones, any sense of security, and the little property they own – requires more concerted international attention and effort than what one guy on a motorbike can offer.

War Crimes by Ex-Seleka Rebels

Hold Commander Accountable for Attack on Town

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/24/central-african-republic-war-crimes-ex-seleka-rebels>

November 25, 2013 – Press Release

(Bangui) – Former Seleka rebel fighters who have been nominally integrated into the national army pillaged and burned a small town in the [Central African Republic](#) on November 10, 2013. The transitional government, led by Interim President Michel Djotodia, should immediately suspend and investigate the military commander who organized the attack.

On November 10, Human Rights Watch saw Gen. Abdallah Hamat, the military commander of a large section of Ombella-Mpoko province, amass his men in the town of Gaga to join an attack against a local armed group, known as the anti-balaka, near the town of Camp Bangui. Four days later, Human Rights Watch reached Camp Bangui and found it totally destroyed. Survivors in Camp Bangui said that Seleka forces were responsible for the devastation. Hamat and another senior military officer acknowledged that their forces had been at Camp Bangui and there had been combat, causing some damage.

“The case of General Hamat is a test for President Djotodia, who has said he won’t tolerate lawlessness by forces under his command,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “Unless the government takes steps to investigate and prosecute those responsible, these types of attacks will keep happening.”

Hamat and former Seleka fighters have committed serious abuses in Camp Bangui and should face justice, Human Right Watch said.

Owing to insecurity in the area, Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm the death toll from Camp Bangui, nor the details of the fighting. However, residents said that three dead bodies found after the attack were all civilians. The death toll is probably higher.

The Seleka, a predominantly Muslim rebel coalition led by Djotodia, overthrew former

President François Bozizé on March 24. A September Human Rights Watch [report](#) details the Seleka’s deliberate killing of civilians – including women, children, and the elderly – between March and June and confirms the wanton destruction of more than 1,000 homes, both in the capital, Bangui, and the provinces.

In an apparent attempt to distance himself from these abuses, Djotodia on September 13 officially disbanded the Seleka, some of whose members are believed to be [Chadian](#) and [Sudanese](#). Former Seleka rebels have nominally integrated into a new “national army,” but command and control remain questionable. The group, now referred to as ex-Seleka, continues to commit abuses in the Central African Republic.

Human Rights Watch travelled to the Ombella-Mpoko province on November 10 to investigate the killing of civilians and the burning of homes during an October battle between ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces in Gaga. The anti-balaka – armed groups created by then-President Bozizé to fight banditry – are predominantly Christian and include some soldiers who served under Bozizé in the Central African Armed Forces (FACA). In recent weeks, violence and insecurity in the Central African Republic have taken on an alarming sectarian dimension, as the anti-balaka attack Muslim civilians in response to ex-Seleka [abuses](#).

Early in the morning of November 10, ex-Seleka fighters in Gaga, as they were leaving on motorcycles, told Human Rights Watch that they were “going to Camp Bangui to fight the anti-balaka.” Later that day General Hamat arrived in Gaga with about 12 men. He was followed by one of his officers, Col. Ahmed Akhtahir, who also came with another dozen men.

In Gaga, Hamat requisitioned motorcycles from local transporters. He then requested fuel and “donations” from the local Muslim population, asking an assembled crowd in Arabic: “Are there no loyal Muslims here to donate fuel so we can fight the enemy?” After collecting fuel and money, Hamat and Akhtahir led their forces on motorcycles on a road through a remote area of dense vegetation leading to Camp Bangui, at least 25 kilometers from Gaga and accessible only by motorcycle.

The following day, November 11, when Human Rights Watch sought to confirm reports in Gaga of a fresh attack on Camp Bangui, Commandant Ibrahem Yusef discouraged Human

Rights Watch from following “our men who went to Camp Bangui yesterday” and reporting on the incident.

Three days later, Human Rights Watch visited Camp Bangui and discovered one corpse on the road into town and the smell of decomposing remains. Once at Camp Bangui, Human Rights Watch found a town laid to waste. People had fled their homes without time to pack. Chairs were overturned, and cooking pots remained on burned-out fires. The center of the town had been completely pillaged, and the vast majority of homes, sheltering 300 to 400 families, had been burned.

Although most of the town had been abandoned, a few members of the local population remained. The residents’ accounts consistently described an attack by Hamat’s forces.

One man told Human Rights Watch, “The Seleka came on Sunday morning. We heard shooting from the direction of the football field. They fired into the village and the civilians fled.” Another resident said, “The moment we heard the shooting we ran for the bush. We had no time to prepare our bags.”

There were many burned homes, as well as ruined food, motorcycles, clothes, and furniture. One woman told Human Rights Watch, “They took everything of value that they could and they burned the rest.” Casings from assault rifles and grenade fragments littered the ground.

A resident of Camp Bangui confirmed that some men from the village returned fire on Hamat’s men with homemade hunting rifles. It is not clear if the men were anti-balaka, but the local armed group did have a strong presence in a nearby village.

The surviving population of the town is now living in the bush near the town without housing, medicine, or even the possibility of humanitarian support. The assault on the town violated international humanitarian law prohibitions against attacks against civilians and destruction and looting of civilian property. Those who carried out or ordered the attacks are responsible for war crimes.

“Without further investigation, the number of people who died at Camp Bangui will never

be known,” said Bekele. “Attacks like these on populated areas are causing massive devastation and fear among the population of the Central African Republic.”

On November 15, Human Rights Watch met with Col. Idriss Ahamat, the commanding officer of Gaga under General Hamat. He told the researcher that there had been a battle in Camp Bangui: “Some anti-balaka hid in the houses and those houses had to be burned.” When asked how many houses had been burned he replied, “Many... 200, maybe 300.” He later said that the houses had been burned inadvertently by bullets touching the grass roofs. When pressed by Human Rights Watch on the possibility of 200 homes burned by bullets, he replied, “Maybe it was only 20 or 30 houses burned... sometimes when a fire is burning it can jump from one house to the next when they are close together.”

Human Rights Watch met with General Hamat on November 15 in Bangui. The general said he was at Camp Bangui on November 10, but he downplayed the damage: “Arriving at Camp Bangui there was a combat and some houses were damaged. It was not many, maybe four homes were burned. I was there after the attack on Camp Bangui. I saw this with my own eyes.”

Hamat dismissed allegations that his troops engaged in attacks on civilians or their property, telling Human Rights Watch: “My elements do not have the right to cause disorder. If they do, I will sanction them... I want peace. I want people to return to their homes.”

Human Rights Watch observed a large number of what appeared to be child soldiers in Hamat’s ranks. Asked about the age of one apparently very young soldier carrying a Kalashnikov assault rifle, Commandant Yusef confirmed he was 8 years old and “a good shooter.” When asked about why he would use children so young in combat, Yusef replied, “Adults get worried and sometimes you have to give them drugs, but children just attack without retreating.”

Human Rights Watch also met with Djotodia in November and asked him about any efforts he had taken to halt abuses by his army and by ex-Seleka fighters. He said, “I can’t deny that some of these things happened, but those who are responsible will be punished.”

“The transitional government needs to rein in its forces immediately and bring to justice those overseeing these horrific abuses,” Bekele said. “With this evidence, Djotodia can’t

say he didn't know about this attack. He should suspend Hamat before the general wreaks more havoc on the populace and should investigate and prosecute all those responsible for the Camp Bangui attack."

Crisis in the Central African Republic: Testimony before House Foreign Affairs Committee

Testimony of Philippe Bolopion, United Nations Director at Human Rights Watch

November 19, 2013 – Testimony before Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Bass, thank you for inviting me to testify today. I am so pleased that this subcommittee is turning its attention to the Central African Republic – a country that often gets little attention but is at a point of crisis that demands urgent and immediate engagement by the international community – and the United States.

I came back from the Central African Republic, a landlocked and deeply impoverished country in central Africa, less than two weeks ago. I spent a week in the country on a mission for Human Rights Watch, an international human rights organization.

I arrived in the capital, Bangui, carrying piles of our latest report. It is 79 pages long, and a brutal read. It covers the period from March to June of this year and details the killing of scores of civilians, including women and children, by members of the Seleka rebels, now in power. It also documents the destruction of entire villages.

As bad as I knew the situation was, it did not prepare me for what we found on the ground. We spent several days in Bossangoa, a town of 40,000 inhabitants, 300 kilometers north of Bangui. At the entrance to the town, we found a checkpoint manned by young former Seleka fighters. They were wearing flip-flops, random uniforms, and were carrying old weapons – all trademarks of the now nominally disbanded force.

Yet they rule the town, or what is left of it. Close to 40,000 people are living around the church in one of the worst ad-hoc displaced persons camps I have seen. It reeks of human waste and is filled with bitter smoke and dust. Only a handful of non-governmental organizations and UN agencies provide help.

Many of these people have houses still standing, only a few hundred yards away. They were not displaced by a natural catastrophe, but by fear. They told us that whenever they venture out of the camp, Seleka fighters shoot at them.

Resident after resident told me of losing loved ones to Seleka bullets in their fields or houses. I met Florence Namngafo, a woman roughly my age, carrying a baby with a nasty wound. Her husband was killed by the same Seleka bullet that almost took her baby's arm. She survived by playing dead for hours, unable to assist her infant, who was screaming in pain.

A few hundred yards away, around 4,000 displaced Muslims residents are living in the long-since-closed school and court building. They fled attacks not by the Seleka, which is predominantly Muslim, but by mostly Christian armed groups commonly referred to as "anti-balaka," which means anti-machete. These local groups were activated in reaction to months of ruthless Seleka abuses.

While these mostly Christian armed groups define their purpose as self-defense against Seleka abuses, they have themselves often espoused radical anti-Muslim rhetoric and carried out deadly attacks against Muslim civilians. Such attacks have sometimes been carried out in coordination with better-armed former army elements that remain loyal to former President François Bozizé and seek his return to power.

According to the stories I heard, the anti-balaka groups can be as cruel and abusive as the enemy they purport to defend themselves against.

Massadou Bichefou, an older man with a damaged eye, told me how anti-balaka fighters came to his house at 5 a.m. on a day in early September. He is from a Peuhl community, Muslim nomadic cattle herders. Some of the fighters were dressed in civilian clothing with primitive weapons, he said, while others were in uniform, carrying AK47 rifles. He was able to escape in the dense bush but says he saw the aggressors bring each and every one of his 11 children and grandchildren to a man with a knife, who slit their throats, one by one. The youngest was 8 months old. His two wives met the same fate. He held his tears as he spelled the name and age of every lost one. Some of the attackers, he said, were former neighbors.

Other Peuhl people described how their village was attacked a month ago, also at 5 a.m., by a similar group of anti-balaka who arrived announcing that they wanted to “exterminate all the Muslims.” They separated the men and older boys from the women and the other children. Seydou Hiroyi, who survived, told me that he saw anti-balaka men slit the throat of his 27-year-old brother. When he and the other men fled in panic, the militiamen opened fire, killing three more people, including a 13-year-old boy.

Seydou and a few other men came back at night. All they found were footprints suggesting the women and children had left with the anti-balaka. He is convinced they are all dead. The houses had been looted and burned, and the cattle killed, with only the heads of the animals left on the ground.

Many people we talked to described the conflict in sectarian terms, with Muslims attacking Christians, and Christians attacking Muslims. This was something we had never heard before during research trips to the Central African Republic. It is particularly worrying in a country where both communities have always lived well together, and where the crisis had little to do with religion to begin with. But for months, even though they didn’t always spare Muslim communities, Seleka fighters, who are in overwhelming numbers Muslims, targeted Christian communities with particular viciousness, often looting and destroying churches. This did not go over well with the large Christian majority in the country. Today, those carrying the guns on both sides and committing abuses on defenseless civilians seem eager to exploit religious tensions to their advantage. Though they rarely face off, they attack each other’s perceived communities with abandon.

What this could do to the Central African Republic is extremely worrying, but hard to predict. To get an idea, we ventured out of the relative safety of Bossangoa to a village called Zéré, down the road to the east. During the few hours we drove on a dirt road, we never saw another vehicle, nor a Seleka fighter. Yet all the villages along the road are deserted. And the few women we encountered on the way ran into the bush in fear for their lives at the sound of our vehicle, dropping all their belongings on the road.

Zéré is now an eerie ghost town. The cycle of Seleka attacks on Christians, anti-balaka attacks against Muslims, followed by Seleka reprisals, have left the town in ruins. The church was charred, the Mosque destroyed and the chief of the Muslim neighborhood killed. We counted 300 burned houses. The school and health center have been

completely looted. We talked to a few men who eventually came out of the bush carrying spears, machetes and knives. They live with their families a few kilometers back in the jungle. They told us of their children dying of Malaria and their wives giving birth under trees. No one is helping these people, mainly because of the lack of security and the difficulty reaching them. They told us about the Seleka attacks but claimed to be unaware of what had happened to their Muslim neighbors.

Back in Bangui, I met with the country's interim president, and former Seleka leader, Michel Djotodia. He received me not in the Presidential palace, but in a military camp on a hill in Bangui, in a blacked-out office with omnipresent security cameras. He was open and claimed that he was trying to bring some abusive ex-Seleka commanders under control. But he also tried to downplay the abuses Seleka forces have been responsible for, and at times seemed out of touch with the dangers facing his country.

I also met with the security minister, Pastor Josué Binoua, formerly loyal to Bozizé, the ousted president. He told me that he only had 110 weapons for the 4,500 gendarmes and 1,400 policemen under his command.

I sat down with one of the former Seleka strongmen, and now head of intelligence, Noureddine Adam, who has been accused by Reporters Without Borders, a press freedom organization, of threatening journalists. He too downplayed the abuses described in many harrowing details in our report.

I was left with the impression that no one is really at the helm, and that the country could easily spin out of control.

The religious leaders I met at the national level seemed to be the only ones struggling to keep the country together. The archbishop of Bangui, Dieudonné Nzapalainga, and Imam Omar Kobine Layama are both fully aware of the danger created by sectarian tensions. Both work together to condemn, at great risk to their safety, the abuses committed against civilians of all sides. But they do not control the men with the guns.

So what could be done to prevent the country from spiraling into chaos, with untold numbers of lives claimed in the process?

For now, the international community has placed all its chips on an ill-equipped and ill-trained African peacekeeping mission of 2,500 troops called MICOPAX, initially deployed as a sub-regional force by the Economic Community of Central African States. On December 19, it is supposed to transfer its authority to MISCA, an African Union-led force relying on many of the same countries to supply troops, with a planned strength of 3,652. Without these peacekeepers, the country would probably be in complete anarchy. Only their presence brought back a measure of security in Bangui, or, for example, in the displaced camps of Bossangoa.

But they are not up to the task. In Bangui they rarely patrol the streets and supplement their income by providing private security to businesses and rich individuals. In Bossangoa they sell beer and get pushed around by the Seleka whenever they try to venture outside of the town.

We believe that they should be urgently reinforced by a UN peacekeeping mission of the type that has been successfully deployed in Ivory Coast or Liberia. A few thousand professional and well-equipped blue helmets could deploy throughout the country, in places like Bossangoa or Zéré. With a strong mandate to protect civilians, they would keep the armed men in check, and provide enough security that people could leave the camps and the bush and come back to their villages. They could start rebuilding their houses, cultivating their fields, tend to their cattle, and learn to live together again.

The UN is ready to undertake a peacekeeping mission, with a strong human rights monitoring section, and the US could use its seat in the Security Council to help make it happen. There would be a cost to the US, but it's a worthy investment. The human rights situation is dire, and yet it could get much worse, engulfing the entire region and creating a failed state many armed groups will be eager to exploit. A UN peacekeeping mission could help protect civilians and avert the worst, while it is still possible.

In the interim, there are three things the US should do while it actively works to secure a UN peacekeeping force.

First, the US should do more to support the current AU force on the ground – both diplomatically and technically – to ensure it is, at a minimum, regularly patrolling the streets and where possible, providing some measure of protection for civilians who have

nowhere else to turn. Although the US has been a vocal supporter of the need for greater civilian protection in the Central African Republic, it has not allocated any funds for peacekeeping.

Second, the US could expand its humanitarian assistance in the Central African Republic. In late September, the US provided \$11.5 million for refugees who fled to neighboring countries, while in response to the dramatically deteriorating humanitarian situation a total of roughly \$17 million has been allocated for those suffering at the hands of Seleka and anti-Balaka forces, including \$8.2 million in emergency programs and \$8.8 million in food assistance in FY 2013. According to the UN, half of the population needs help. Although this is one of the worst situations in the world, it's also grossly underfunded. Finally, the US could sanction those most responsible for human rights abuses, including Seleka leaders, with visa bans and asset freezes. It may be unlikely that these individuals actually have assets in the United States or intend to travel here but such a step would nonetheless make an important contribution toward accountability. The US could also work with other members of the UN Security Council to push for similar global UN sanctions against these individuals, to help raise the cost of abuses and seek to interrupt the cycle of violence.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I'm happy to answer your questions.

“We Live and Die Here Like Animals”

Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/14/we-live-and-die-here-animals>

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The Central African Republic has suffered a horrific collapse. But is the worst violence between the country's Muslims and Christians yet to come?

BOSSANGOA, Central African Republic — In the schoolrooms of the northern [Central African Republic](#) (CAR), the blackboards still show dates from late March -- when Seleka rebels seized power in the country and a nightmare began. Since then, the armed Seleka, whose collective name means "alliance" in Sango, the local language, have ruled through fear: burning down village after village, firing randomly at civilians from their pick-up trucks, executing farmers in their fields, and murdering women and children. Their brutality continues to spread like a deadly cancer.

Hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee their homes and hide deep in the bush, where countless have died from disease. The Ouham prefecture, where [170,000 people](#) have been displaced, is the country's worst-affected area. Around Bossangoa, Ouham's capital, it is possible to drive for hours without seeing a single person in a village -- and the sound of a car engine is enough to stir terror among the displaced walking along rutted, rural dirt roads in search of safety.

In early November, as I traveled around the region with photographer Marcus Bleasdale to [document](#) the widespread violence, people often mistook our car for a Seleka military vehicle. One day, our passage was blocked by the meager bundles of belongings dropped by a family that had fled into the bush as they heard us approach. We found a toddler crying on the road: His parents had lost him as they ran away. When they emerged a few minutes later, after much coaxing, they explained that they had been walking all night to reach Bossangoa, where some 40,000 people are living in dismal, cramped conditions around a Catholic church. "There are so many children dying... from malaria and typhoid fever," the exhausted father told us. His family had fled their town after a Seleka attack in

mid-October that killed dozens. "There is no food, but most of the people are still hiding in the bush because of the long distance to Bossangoa, and the insecurity on the roads."

Since its independence from France in 1960, almost every political transition in the CAR has been marred by violence, and those who commit it have rarely been brought to justice. Recent developments are no exception: The Seleka, a coalition of three rebel factions that had been independently fighting the central government for several years, formed in late 2012 over President François Bozizé's failure to bring promised development to the marginalized north, where security and social services were almost totally absent, and to implement power-sharing peace agreements. After a months-long offensive, the Seleka seized Bangui, the CAR's capital, and ousted Bozizé in March.

Almost all of the Seleka's leaders and fighters are Muslims, a small minority in the CAR that has suffered discrimination at the hands of leaders from the country's Christian majority. Many of the Seleka may not even be CAR citizens, but instead come from Sudan and Chad. CAR's self-declared president, Michel Djotodia, a former Seleka leader, has ordered the rebel forces to disband, but they continue to rule with the gun, particularly throughout the north.

Worsening the situation, fury with the Seleka is now spilling over into vicious armed resistance among Christians. One Muslim woman remembers a Christian militant saying to her during an anti-Muslim attack in Ouham that killed hundreds in September, "Muslims overthrew President Bozizé, and there will be no safety for Muslims until [the] Seleka [are] gone." At another massacre of Muslims the same month, a militia leader told captured villagers, "We will kill all the Muslims, and we will kill all of your livestock," before his fighters cut the throat of one man and opened fire on the others, killing four more. If nothing is done, the CAR could descend into a deep, inter-communal religious conflict -- with much greater bloodshed than even what we've seen thus far. In early November, the United Nations went so far as to warn that [the current conflict](#) is at risk of escalating into genocide.

Already, the human toll, as recounted by those who have survived or witnessed violence, is shocking.

Nicole Faraganda, 34, gave birth to a little girl on Oct. 9 in the village of Wikamo in Ouham. The next day, four vehicles with Seleka fighters tore down the road in front of her hut, spraying gunfire at the fleeing population. Still recovering from giving birth, Nicole was a bit slower than her fellow villagers, and she was shot dead, as was a 12-year-old neighbor, Samuel Denamjora. The Seleka fighters then got out of their vehicles, looted the local school and hospital, and systematically burned down hundreds of thatched-roof homes.

The Seleka fighters proceeded to the market town of Ouham Bac, where they shot down another nine civilians. Three more died from drowning after jumping into a nearby, fast-flowing river to escape the gunmen. One of the victims, Gaston Sanbogai, 22, was a blind man left behind by his neighbors when they fled. He tried to hide in the bushes near his home, but the Seleka fighters found him, pulled him out, and shot him dead.

At the large but deserted market town of Ndjo, we asked the few local villagers we could find to take us to their hiding places in the bush. Over four kilometers, we had to wade through a waist-deep river and follow narrow tracks. At the first lean-to shelter, we found the dignified village chief of Ndjo, 55-year-old Rafael Newane, whose face was lined with sadness. He showed us the graves of two of his grandchildren, Frediane Mobene, 9 months, and Orelia Newane, 6 months, who had died just a week before, three days apart, from untreated malaria.

At the next shelter, we found Placide Yamini, Ndjo's medical officer, who had buried his sister, dead from malaria 48 hours before. He told us that, every week, there are four or five deaths among the displaced villagers. Despite his medical training, he is unable to help most of them: Seleka fighters looted Ndjo's hospital and its pharmacy on Sept. 16, leaving Yamini without medications. He showed us his tiny medical kit, which held just a single bandage and a few surgical tools, and said he had been living like this since the Seleka came to power. "We live and die here like animals," he added, barely able to contain his anger.

Those who have made it to Bossangoa live in desperate conditions: Every structure and inch of space around the town's Catholic church -- its seminary, guest house, school, library, storage rooms, soccer pitch, and the surrounding fields -- have been taken over by displaced people, all Christians. The camp is so crowded, and filled with noise and the smoke of cooking fires, that it is difficult to walk among the tiny tents, hardly large enough

for two people but sheltering entire families. We had to use local guides to avoid getting lost.

Just down the road, hundreds of displaced Muslims have sought safety at the town's school. This separation, and the presence of Seleka fighters in Bossangoa under the command of a man who calls himself General "Yaya" and only converses in Arabic, is a reminder that, even while serving as something of a safe haven for villagers who have nowhere else to go, Bossangoa is not entirely secure.

As we were walking in the church camp one day, a Christian boy came running to the local priest to say his uncle had just been shot dead by Seleka fighters at a nearby checkpoint. When we went to investigate, we found the uncle still alive but badly beaten. He had crossed into the Muslim quarter of town to look for his straying livestock. A displaced Muslim woman started yelling at him, and then told the Seleka fighters to kill him, accusing his parents of fighting against Seleka. The Seleka fighters beat the uncle with the back of their guns, and then brought a knife to cut his throat. He struggled and managed to run away. The Seleka fighters fired at him but missed.

Farming has also become a dangerous occupation for Bossangoa's besieged civilians. Almost every day, Seleka fighters and armed cattle herders shoot farmers dead, but many still take extraordinary risks to go to their fields to find food. On Oct. 24, Thierry Demokossai, 40 and the father of five, was working in his manioc field together with several neighbors when four Seleka fighters approached on foot. Without any provocation, they shot him in the head and then killed two of his neighbors, according to his grieving wife.

After months of suffering such abuses at the hands of Seleka fighters, the mostly Christian communities of the northern CAR have begun to organize an armed response. Bozizé, the deposed president, organized village self-defense forces years ago to fight an epidemic of criminal gangs known as *coupeurs du route* ("road bandits"). Today, these militias, called anti-*balaka* (*balaka* means "machete" in Sango), are fighting the Seleka. They are armed with homemade hunting weapons, knives, and swords, and adorned with colorful fetishes that they believe protect them from bullets.

A leader of the anti-balaka forces whom we met in Ouham said, "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, our fight is only against the Seleka and to protect the population from them. We are the youth, organized by ourselves in self-defense." But worryingly, the anti-balaka do not just target Seleka: On a number of occasions, they have devastated Muslim communities.

In the early morning of Sept. 6, anti-balaka forces working with military elements loyal to Bozizé carried out a series of brutal surprise and near-simultaneous attacks on Seleka bases and Muslim communities in several villages around Bossangoa, killing dozens. Muslim males, regardless of age, faced death. Tala Astita, 55, was in the town of Zere when its Muslim quarter was attacked at 5 a.m. Fighters carrying AK-47s came to her house and ordered her husband, Bouba Gai, and her 13-year-old son, Halidou Bouba, to lay down before hacking them to death with machetes. The attackers then set the house on fire and tossed the two corpses into the flames. Other Muslims were similarly murdered.

Astita escaped by convincing the killers she was a Christian. She then hid for several weeks in the bush and disguised her 3-year-old son as a girl with earrings to save his life. Her 14-year-old daughter, Kande Bouba, as well as her husband's other wife and 4-year-old daughter, were taken away alive by the anti-balaka during the attack on Zere and remain missing.

At the same time as the attacks, anti-balaka forces raided dozens of Muslim-owned cattle camps, killing people and stealing thousands of cattle. Particular brutality was reserved for the nomadic Mbororo Muslims, despised by Christian farmers long before the current conflict because they often herd cattle into farmers' fields and destroy crops. The tensions between sedentary Christians and nomadic Muslims show that claims to the land are yet another dimension of the CAR's violence -- much like they have been in Darfur.

Aishatu Isa, an Mbororo woman in her forties, was in a cattle camp near the town of Ber Zembe when fighters attacked around mid-day. Surrounding the nomads, they took Isa's 3-year-old boy, Khalidou Ngadjo, from her arms while gathering all of the male members in the camp. The attackers slit the young boy's throat, then the throats of Bouba Keriyo, 10, and Tahirou, 14. They also slit the throat of the one adult male in the camp, named Yaya

Douka. The women were allowed to leave after witnessing the killings, but as they ran, they heard the fighters arguing as to whether the women should live or die.

The anti-balaka's attacks have triggered brutal reprisals by Seleka fighters against Christian communities. This heinous cycle of inter-religious violence only continues to intensify, threatening to explode into an all-out war between Christians and Muslims. Up to now, the response of the international community has been minuscule. A small African military force, called FOMAC, rarely leaves its bases and often yields to the authority of the Seleka. It thus does little to help the civilian population -- aside from running a brisk trade in beer from their compound in Bossangoa. A more robust peacekeeping force, like the United Nations force now deployed in the neighboring [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), is needed.

Because the Seleka have targeted humanitarian organizations, enhanced security is particularly necessary to permit the unfettered provision of aid. To date, very little of what food, water, and medical assistance have been sent has reached the displaced; in many of the villages we visited, we were the first foreigners anyone had seen since Seleka took power.

As we returned from our drives through Ouham, we were greeted not by the panic we had seen initially, but by villagers emerging from the bush, waving and yelling "*Merci*." The people of the CAR deserve better than the glimmer of hope that seeing a car carrying people who do not wish to harm or kill them brings. They deserve immediate relief, as well as eventual justice, served to those who have committed crimes -- and breaking the CAR's longstanding cycle of violence and impunity.

UN Human Rights Council: Interactive Dialogue on the Human Rights Situation in the Central African Republic

HRC 24th Session: Statement Delivered Under Item 10

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/25/un-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue-human-rights-situation-central-african->

September 25, 2013 – Statement

Human Rights Watch welcomes the report of the fact-finding mission of the Office of the High Commissioner to the Central African Republic and shares the conclusions that “both the forces of the former Government and the non-State armed group Séléka committed serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law during the conflict.”

Human Rights Watch research confirms the deliberate killing of civilians – including women, children, and the elderly – between March and June 2013 and the intentional destruction of more than 1,000 homes, both in the capital, Bangui, and in the provinces. Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of scores of people from injuries, hunger or sickness. Schools and churches were also looted and burned. The Seleka killed scores of civilians trying to flee and have prompted whole communities to escape into the bush. As soon as the Seleka took Bangui on March 24, its fighters started to attack civilians and pillage the city. They began targeting members of the national army, the Central African Armed Forces (Forces Armées Centrafricaines, FACA), and summarily executed men it believed were FACA members.

Interim President Michel Djotodia has denied that Seleka fighters have committed abuses, and continues to shift blame for the violence between Bozizé loyalists, “false Seleka,” and bandits. But at least one Seleka official in the field admitted responsibility for some attacks to Human Rights Watch. Evidence indicates that Seleka fighters forced villagers out of their homes in order to loot them.

In 2013, the overwhelming majority of attacks against civilians were committed in Seleka-held territory—including by very young fighters, some as young as 13 years old. The Bozizé government, and particularly the Presidential Guard, have also been implicated in serious

human rights abuses, including in an illegal detention facility at the Bossembélé military training center.

The transitional government appears unable to rein in Seleka forces or enforce security in the country. On September 13, transitional President Djotodia dissolved the Seleka coalition and announced official state forces were in charge of security. We are concerned that to date, no detail was provided as to how these forces would disarm the thousands of Seleka fighters across the country. In addition, the government remains unwilling to recognize that Seleka is committing abuses and fails to bring those responsible to justice. The Seleka should immediately end its killings and pillage, restore order, and allow access to desperately needed humanitarian assistance. The Seleka leadership needs to take all necessary measures to control its forces, denounce killings by its members and supporters, restore civilian administration throughout the country, and ensure accountability for the crimes committed.

The UN Security Council should expand the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) to allow the mission to monitor, investigate and report publicly to the Council on any abuses or violations of international human rights or humanitarian law committed anywhere in the country. The Human Rights Council also has a responsibility to address the ongoing crisis in the Central African Republic. It should fully support the recommendations made by the High Commissioner, including through the establishment of a special procedure to monitor and report on the situation in the country, and with the priority mandate to strengthen the justice system and combat impunity.

Can Africa Offer Homegrown Solutions to its Problems?

Author: Tiseke Kasambala, South Africa Director at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/23/can-africa-offer-homegrown-solutions-its-problems>

September 23, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The SA Sunday Independent*

UNDER an arrangement between former Central African Republic (CAR) president François Bozizé and President Jacob Zuma, South Africa deployed more than 200 soldiers in January to train CAR's army and protect its president from Seleka, a rebel coalition. On March 23, however, in a fierce battle, Seleka overran the SANDF unit, killing 13 of its soldiers.

Seleka entered Bangui, the capital, and the remaining SANDF soldiers were called home. Yet, in spite of the events in March, South Africa should not give up on the central African nation.

Since the fall of Bangui, chaos and disorder have spread throughout CAR on an unprecedented scale. Seleka fighters, a loose coalition of once-competing groups from the north-east, began to attack residents in Bangui and elsewhere.

Residents told Human Rights Watch (HRW) that during Seleka's infamous assault on the Boy-Rabe neighbourhood in Bangui in April, the Seleka gunned down innocent people, including the elderly and children, who were trying to flee the fighting. In rural areas, villagers, hidden in bushes, spoke about the looting of their homes, the attacks they endured, and their hunger and sickness.

A new Human Rights Watch report, “I Can Still Smell the Dead: The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic”, details scores of killings between March and June and confirms the deliberate destruction of more than 1 000 homes in this forgotten country. I can't help but wonder what would have happened had the SANDF been able to hold off the Seleka. Perhaps these abuses might not have happened. But we should remember that the Bozizé regime defended by South Africa had committed its own horrific abuses, as Human Rights Watch documented.

We Africans like to talk about African solutions to African problems, but we don't often talk about what those solutions are.

One element of an African solution might be to not tolerate abuse by an African government or rebel group and to stand in solidarity with its victims, as countless people (African and non-African) did for South Africans during the apartheid era.

Another aspect of an African solution might be to take a principled stand and condemn countries that condone or support abuses.

Human Rights Watch shows in its latest report on CAR how the Seleka appear to draw support from Chadian fighters, even though Chad's government is also providing peacekeepers to stabilise the region.

CAR clearly needs more principled and co-ordinated support from fellow Africans, particularly as conditions in the country worsen.

From July to September, Human Rights Watch received credible reports of intensified Seleka attacks on civilians throughout the country. The humanitarian situation teeters on the verge of disaster, with growing numbers of internally displaced people and refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries.

The transitional president, the Seleka leader Michel Djotodia, announced he was dissolving the coalition earlier this month, but it remains unclear what will happen with its armed fighters.

Africa's leadership is essential to provide security, humanitarian assistance, and justice in CAR. On August 1, the regional peacekeeping mission in CAR, known as Micopax, transitioned into an AU-led mission with a mandate to protect civilians.

The AU's Peace and Security Council is calling for an increase of 2 500 troops, over the 1 000 already on the ground.

These initiatives to increase protection for civilians are a good start, but more needs to be done to stop the violence.

The UN will soon be taking up the questions both of how to strengthen its presence and how to provide much-needed logistical, financial, and technical support to the AU mission. Unfortunately, Rwanda and Togo, the two sub-Saharan African countries on the Security Council, have not exercised their leadership to help strengthen UN support to the AU-led mission.

The Forgotten Crisis in the Central African Republic

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/18/forgotten-crisis-central-african-republic>

September 18, 2013 – Op-ed Published in *The Independent*

With the world's attention focused on Syria, another human rights catastrophe unfolds unnoticed, in a forgotten corner of the world called Central African Republic (CAR). A ruthless rebel coalition called the Seleka has engaged in the arbitrary and rampant murder of civilians, including women, children and the elderly. Countless people there, particularly in rural areas, have fled their homes and are camped out in the bush, living in constant fear of attack by Seleka fighters.

Little known outside France, its former coloniser, CAR has been bedeviled by the twin curses of poverty and misrule. Its former strongman president, François Bozizé, who took power in a coup in 2003, was overthrown by the Seleka in March this year. Emerging from the remote and impoverished northeast, the Seleka, or “alliance” in the national language, has engaged in widespread abuses.

When I travelled to CAR earlier this year, I expected chaos, but not the sheer human suffering endured by the people I met. Villagers, hidden in bushes, would speak to me only after I gently convinced them that I was not part of the Seleka. When I finally earned their trust, they told me about the looting of their homes, the terrifying attacks they endured, their hunger and sickness.

One victim told me how he had to flee the village with his sick father. He tried to care for his ailing father in the bush, but hopelessly watched him die, because the local clinic had been looted by Seleka fighters and the roads were too dangerous for travel.

Another man described how the Seleka rounded up five men from his village, tied them up, and then gunned them down. A local official, he said, “went door to door in the village to ask people to leave their homes and come to a meeting to talk with the Seleka. The first few left their homes, five of them, and were grouped under a tree...their arms were attached to each other. They were then shot down one by one.”

During the Seleka's assault on the Boy-Rabe neighbourhood of Bangui, the capital, in April, I spoke with fleeing victims who told more tragic tales: a man who frantically called his son to warn him not to go outside, only to hear a few hours later that he'd been killed; another man who watched as his wife and infant were murdered in front of him on his doorstep; a resident who watched his neighbour shot down after he tried to hide women fleeing the shooting; and parents who were forced to the floor at gunpoint while their daughter was raped by a Seleka fighter.

Human Rights Watch's new report, '[I Can Still Smell the Dead: The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic](#)' details these killings between March and June, both in Bangui and in the provinces, and confirms the deliberate destruction of more than 1,000 homes.

Since Human Rights Watch left CAR in June, the situation has worsened. From July to September we have received credible reports of Seleka attacks on civilians throughout the country. The humanitarian situation teeters on the verge of disaster, with growing numbers of internally displaced people and refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Transitional president and Seleka leader Michel Djotodia announced the dissolution of the rebel coalition earlier this month, but it remains unclear what will happen with its armed fighters. When I was in CAR, many of the people I spoke to showed signs of deep trauma, and begged both for assistance and the world's attention. Aid workers are trying to address basic needs, but are themselves targeted. On 7 September, two employees of the French charity ACTED were killed. Media reports implicate Seleka fighters in the deaths.

This July, [Lynne Featherstone](#), the parliamentary under-secretary of state for international development, announced that the UK would give £5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN Humanitarian Air Service, to enable them to continue to deliver critical support to CAR. This is a good first step and deserves recognition.

But more needs to be done to stop the violence. The UK should help the African Union peacekeeping mission in CAR ensure civilian protection by providing much-needed and requested logistical and financial support. Through its seat on the UN Security Council, the UK should push for targeted sanctions on those responsible for human rights abuses, including Seleka leaders. Finally, the UK should support efforts to bring to account,

including by the International Criminal Court, perpetrators of human rights crimes in the country, both past and present.

The phrase I heard most often in CAR was “don’t forget us.” I doubt I’ll be able to, given the terrible things I saw. Central Africans urgently need humanitarian assistance, security, and justice. If only more people could find them on a map.

Horrible Abuses by New Rulers

Ex-Rebel Coalition Should Restore Security, Provide Aid

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/18/central-african-republic-horrible-abuses-new-rulers>

September 18, 2013 – Press Release

(New York) – The Seleka, a coalition of rebel groups that took power in the [Central African Republic](#) in March, has killed scores of unarmed civilians, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The Seleka has also engaged in wanton destruction of numerous homes and villages.

The 79-page report, [“I Can Still Smell the Dead”: The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic,](#) details the deliberate killing of civilians – including women, children, and the elderly – between March and June 2013 and confirms the deliberate destruction of more than 1,000 homes, both in the capital, Bangui, and in the provinces. Many villagers have fled their homes and are living in the bush in fear of new attacks. Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of scores of people from injuries, hunger or sickness.

“Seleka leaders promised a new beginning for the people of the Central African Republic, but instead have carried out large-scale attacks on civilians, looting, and murder,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “What’s worse is that the Seleka have recruited children as young as 13 to carry out some of this carnage.”

Human Rights Watch carried out extensive research in the country from April to June, including numerous interviews with victims, relatives of victims, and witnesses. Researchers assembled detailed accounts of attacks on civilians in both Bangui and the provinces.

The Seleka should immediately end its killings and pillage, restore order, and allow access to desperately needed humanitarian assistance, Human Rights Watch said. The Seleka leadership should control its forces, denounce killings by its members and supporters,

restore civilian administration throughout the country, and ensure accountability for the crimes committed.

International bodies and concerned countries should help the African Union peacekeeping mission to carry out its job and should impose targeted sanctions on those responsible for human rights abuses, including Seleka leaders.

“The Central African Republic truly is a forgotten human rights and humanitarian crisis,” Bekele said. “Driven from their homes by the Seleka, countless people are living in the bush in tents made from trees and leaves, and without access to food or water. They need immediate assistance and protection.”

Among the killings Human Rights Watch documented, in Bangui’s Damala neighborhood, the Seleka killed 17 people on March 27. On April 13, a Seleka vehicle drove into a funeral procession. The mourners, enraged, threw stones at the Seleka, whose members opened fire on the crowd, killing at least 18 civilians on the Ngaragba Bridge near the Ouango and Kassai neighborhoods. On April 13 and 14, the Seleka carried out an extensive looting operation in the Bangui neighbourhood of Boy-Rabe, killing scores of civilians, including children.

Outside the capital, and away from the eyes of the small African Union peacekeeping force, the Seleka has attacked villages with total impunity. Human Rights Watch recorded more than 1,000 homes destroyed in at least 34 villages in the north between February and June. In one instance, a self-appointed Seleka official coordinated the killings of five men who were tied up and executed.

One witness noted: “[He] went door to door in the village to ask people to leave their homes and come to a meeting to talk with the Seleka. The first few left their homes, five of them, and were grouped under a tree ... their arms were attached to each other. They were then shot down one by one.”

The report also highlights numerous murders of people associated with the army under ousted president, François Bozizé. For example, on April 15, Seleka forces forced nine men suspected of being former soldiers into a vehicle and drove them to the Mpoko River, outside of Bangui. Seleka members summarily executed five of the men. The survivors

gave Human Rights Watch a step-by-step description of how they were driven to the river, made to line up, and readied for execution until a Seleka member realized that the men had not in fact been soldiers under Bozizé and spared those who had not yet been killed.

In interviews with Human Rights Watch, representatives of the transitional government, many of them former Seleka leaders, including the transitional president, Michel Djotodia, downplayed the scale of the killings, claiming that most were the work of “false Seleka” or those loyal to Bozizé. But Human Rights Watch research points to a consistent pattern of abuse by forces credibly linked with Seleka.

Human Rights Watch also documented crimes that had been committed under Bozizé and interviewed former prisoners who were recently released from the Bossembélé military training center outside of Bangui. Detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were held incommunicado and in inhumane conditions for months or years, many of them tortured.

They and other sources told Human Rights Watch that Bozizé would visit the center and that he had a private villa there. Detainees told Human Rights Watch of at least two men being forced to dig holes before being shot dead and buried by the Presidential Guards. The majority of detainees at Bossembélé were Muslims from the north who were accused of being rebels.

The Seleka has failed to investigate or prosecute any of the abuses committed by its own members. Instead, it has pursued justice for crimes committed by the former government. On May 29, the national prosecutor announced an international arrest warrant against Bozizé, who fled CAR; recent reports indicate he is in France.

The absence of thorough investigations and prosecutions has eroded public confidence in the judicial system and in the rebel government, which has promised elections in 18 months.

“The Seleka might have real grievances against the former regime, but nothing excuses this level of violence against civilians,” Bekele said. “The Seleka seem more focused on looting and targeting the general population than on reestablishing a functioning government that can protect people from abuse.”

In recent weeks, violence has increased in northern Central African Republic around the Bossangoa area. On September 7 two employees of the French non-governmental organization the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development were killed outside of Bossangoa. Their killers are reported to be Seleka fighters.

On September 13 transitional president Djotodia dissolved the Seleka coalition and announced official state forces were in charge of security. No detail was provided as to how these forces would neutralize the thousands of Seleka fighters across the country.

New CAR President— More Misrule

Author: Lewis Mudge, Researcher at Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/08/16/dispatches-new-car-president-more-misrule>

August 16, 2013 – Dispatch

Michel Djotodia, the rebel leader who took control of the Central African Republic (CAR) will be sworn in as president this Sunday. He will steer the country until elections in late 2014.

In March, his rebel movement known as Seleka overthrew François Bozizé, under whose regime serious [human rights abuses](#) were committed. So far the Seleka have managed to make Bozizé's era almost seem like good days – no easy feat.

The Seleka have committed grave human rights abuses with impunity while to a large extent the rest of the world has watched in either ignorance, apathy, or both.

So what can Central Africans expect from Djotodia? If the first five months are anything to go by, more anarchy and misrule.

The takeover of CAR's capital Bangui on March 24 was marked by a spree of [killing, raping, and looting](#). Human Rights Watch documented how Seleka fighters abducted and executed suspected members of the national army. Rebels killed children in front of their parents, and besieged and looted entire neighborhoods. [Journalists](#) in Bangui continue to receive death threats.

Outside of the capital the situation is even worse. Human Rights Watch has [described](#) how Seleka fighters killed civilians as they were fleeing their homes, destroyed villages, looted schools and medical centers, and stole grain stocks. People fled to the bush and more now die from disease, hunger, and exposure than from Seleka bullets.

The [humanitarian situation](#) teeters on the verge of a catastrophe. The numbers of [internally displaced people and refugees](#) to neighboring countries continue to grow.

The administrative state has been gutted and many official documents have been destroyed. It is impossible to imagine credible elections taking place in just over a year.

CAR has long been ignored by the world, but this trend may be shifting. On [August 5](#) UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called for an end to impunity for serious human rights abuses in CAR, including the consideration of sanctions. The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court [issued](#) her second warning in August that the crimes may fall under the ICC's jurisdiction and that her office will prosecute if necessary.

As Djotodia takes his oath, Human Rights Watch continues to receive credible reports of killings in the provinces. The new president of CAR should act fast to control his men. The world is starting to pay attention.

Seleka Forces Kill Scores, Burn Villages

UN Security Council Should Sanction Abusive Seleka Leaders

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/27/central-african-republic-seleka-forces-kill-scores-burn-villages>

June 27, 2013 – Press Release

(Johannesburg) – Members of the Seleka rebel coalition, which overthrew President François Bozizé of the [Central African Republic](#) on March 24, 2013, have targeted and killed at least 40 civilians, and intentionally destroyed 34 villages or towns since February. Human Rights Watch researchers in early June found extensive evidence of rampant abuses in largely rural areas outside the capital, Bangui.

The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) will submit a report on the situation in Central African Republic to the UN Security Council before June 30 for a discussion at the UN Security Council in the coming weeks. The Security Council should consider options to reinforce peacekeeping outside of Bangui and adopt individual sanctions against Seleka leaders responsible for serious human rights violations. The Security Council should also demand full cooperation from transition authorities for the ongoing fact-finding mission, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, into abuses committed in the country since December 2012.

“The world doesn’t seem to notice that the Central African Republic is facing a catastrophic situation,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director. “Seleka fighters are killing civilians and burning villages to the ground while some villagers are dying in the bush for lack of assistance.”

United Nations agencies and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations should make every effort to reach the affected population, assess their needs, and provide them with critical assistance.

Human Rights Watch researchers travelled to Bangui and the provinces of Mbomou in the southeast and Gribingui and Ouham in the north. Human Rights Watch was able to confirm that in attacks on 34 villages and towns, primarily carried out by Seleka fighters from

February 11 to June 2, more than 1,000 houses had been burned and at least 40 civilians killed. Seleka forces targeted some communities to quell resistance and to pillage. During these attacks, the Seleka forces were shooting at civilians randomly, Human Rights Watch found.

Earlier in 2013, Human Rights Watch documented the [grave human rights abuses](#) against civilians, including pillage, summary executions, rape, and torture by Seleka members in Bangui.

Human Rights Watch researchers in June interviewed more than 100 witnesses to the attacks on civilians. In the Ouham province, witnesses described the killing of 13 civilians in the villages of Bade, Bougone, and Gbodoro on May 19; the killing of 10 civilians in the village of Ouin on May 1; and the killing of 5 civilians in the villages of Boubou and Zéré on April 18 and 20. Human Rights Watch also received credible reports of the killings of at least 12 civilians in the town of Ouango in the Mbomou province on April 21 and 22. Under international humanitarian law, murder and the deliberate targeting and killing of civilians constitute war crimes.

Witnesses said the attackers were Seleka fighters in uniform, sometimes in cooperation with armed Mbarara – nomadic pastoralists who move their cattle between Chad and the Central African Republic – who traveled on horseback or motorcycle. The Seleka fired on civilians, often while they were fleeing. One witness from the village of Gbade told Human Rights Watch, “When they entered the village, they started chasing at us [and] shot at people inside their homes or running outside toward the bush. Most of the villagers were shot in the back while running.”

Seleka forces and a self-proclaimed local official, Adoum Takaji, arrived in the village of Ouin on May 1, witnesses said. Villagers had fled to the bush because of previous violence. The Seleka and Takaji said to the villagers they were organizing a meeting to persuade the local population to return to their homes.

They convinced reluctant villagers to gather, assembled five men, tied them together and shot them. One witness told Human Rights Watch, “One of [the victims] was not killed on the spot so they cut his throat with a long knife.” The Seleka fighters then shot at fleeing civilians and killed five other people. The entire village fled into the surrounding forest,

where they remain.

The targeting of civilians and burning of homes forced many people to abandon their villages. Human Rights Watch spoke with residents of affected villages who reported they are living in the surrounding bush and nearby forests. Village leaders said that dozens of residents, particularly the elderly, infants, and the ill, have died in the bush. All of the villagers with whom Human Rights Watch spoke are living with minimal or no humanitarian assistance. Conditions have worsened since the start of the rainy season.

Villagers in the Gribingui and Ouham provinces expressed their deep concern and fear of further attacks by Seleka fighters. A resident from the village of Boubou, living in the bush out of fear for his safety, implored Human Rights Watch researchers, “Send help ... quickly so we can live in the village because we sleep in the forest like animals.”

Human Rights Watch documented the destruction of two churches in the villages of Yangoumara and Gbi-Gbi, and the looting and destruction of a school in Yangoumara. Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Seleka forces carried out the attacks in collaboration with armed Mbarara. The deliberate destruction of civilian property, as well as structures and goods indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, also constitute war crimes under international humanitarian law.

Noureddine Adam, a Seleka general who is the public security minister in the country’s transitional government, denied that the Seleka were responsible for any of the attacks Human Rights Watch documented. “These attacks were perpetrated by other armed groups before our arrival,” he told Human Rights Watch. “The Seleka is not involved in this destruction of villages nor in the killings.”

All attacks documented by Human Rights Watch researchers took place in Seleka-controlled areas. The Seleka leadership is ultimately responsible for the conduct of its forces and should effectively investigate any human rights abuse and prosecute those responsible.

In areas Human Rights Watch visited there were no police or judicial authorities. The transitional government should re-establish the rule of law throughout the country by redeploying local civilian authorities.

Adam said that 15 provincial administrators and military commanders had already been appointed and provided with sufficient resources to perform their duties. He said they would be deployed soon to reestablish a functioning civil administration.

The UN Security Council should support peacekeeping efforts throughout the country and make clear that it intends to adopt targeted sanctions against people responsible for serious human rights violations. UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon recommended consideration of sanctions in a report to the Security Council on May 3.

The UN Security Council should also express support for the ongoing fact-finding mission mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, demand that the transitional government and Seleka leaders fully cooperate, and instruct the BINUCA to provide all necessary support to the mission.

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the African Union, the [European Union](#), the UN Security Council, and [France](#) should bolster peacekeeping efforts in the Central African Republic. They should support efforts by the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX), a regional peacekeeping force led by the Economic Community of Central African States, to deploy additional troops throughout the country. They should also support the ongoing disarmament of Seleka fighters in Bangui and initiate this process in the provinces.

Additional troops and civilian police with sufficient and effective logistic support in Bangui and the provinces would increase the MICOPAX capacity to provide security and protection to the affected civilian population.

In his report to the Security Council on May 3 the UN secretary general appealed to the partners of the Central African Republic to provide effective logistical and financial support to MICOPAX. On June 14 the ECCAS in Libreville made a commitment to reinforce the security in Bangui.

“Human Rights Watch researchers, in village after village, heard one thing from residents: ‘Don’t abandon us’,” Bekele said. “The UN and others actors should redouble efforts to assist this largely forgotten population.”

Rampant Abuses After Coup

New Government Should Rein in Ex-Rebel Forces

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/central-african-republic-rampant-abuses-after-coup>

May 10, 2013 – Press Release

(Bangui) – Members of the Seleka rebel coalition, which ousted President François Bozizé of the [Central African Republic](#) on March 24, 2013, have committed grave violations against civilians, including pillage, summary executions, rape, and torture, Human Rights Watch said today.

When the Seleka took control of Bangui, the rebels went on a looting spree, killing civilians, raping women, and settling scores with members of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA), Human Rights Watch found. Many of these killings occurred in urban areas in broad daylight.

“If the Seleka coalition, as it claims, wants to undo the wrongs of the previous government, it should immediately end its horrific abuses,” said [Daniel Bekele](#), Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The government should show it is committed to the rule of law by investigating and prosecuting attacks by Seleka troops against civilians.”

Seleka means “alliance,” in Sango, Central African Republic’s principal language. It represents a coalition of several rebel forces that came together to address human rights abuses and poverty in the northeastern part of the country. Human Rights Watch previously reported that President Bozizé’s armed forces [in this region in 2007](#) engaged in summary executions, unlawful killings, beatings, house burnings, extortion and unlawful taxation, the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, and many other human rights violations.

Over a 10-day research investigation in Bangui in late April 2013, Human Rights Watch spoke with about 70 witnesses, victims, local human rights defenders, journalists, authorities from the previous and new governments, and other sources. Human Rights Watch uncovered scores of killings committed by Seleka forces in Bangui, the capital, after

the March 24 coup and received credible information about further killings by Seleka troops throughout the country between December 2012 and April.

Authorities in the new government told Human Rights Watch that the abuses documented had been carried out by former members of the Bozizé government or by “fake Seleka.” Noureddine Adam, state minister of public security, said that the Seleka maintain control over their troops.

But Human Rights Watch interviewed multiple witnesses who provided compelling evidence, including eyewitness accounts, that Seleka forces were responsible for the majority of abuses against civilians both immediately before and after the coup. In addition, Seleka commanders appear not to maintain discipline within their ranks, as Human Rights Watch documented numerous cases in which Seleka rebels killed their own members.

Human Rights Watch believes that the statements from witnesses establish that the rebels were, on a local level, taking orders from their immediate commanders. As one witness to the killing of a fleeing unarmed civilian told Human Rights Watch, “The [local commander] gave the order and then she fired.”

“The government has an obligation to control the rebels who brought it to power, to prevent abuses, and punish those who commit them,” Bekele said. “Without security, the government will not be able to govern effectively or protect civilians.”

Human Rights Watch calls on the **Government of the Central African Republic and the Seleka leadership** to:

- Restore law and order in the 15 provinces under its control by urgently deploying zone commanders under the leadership of the Public Security and Defense ministries;
- Reinstate institutions in the entire territory, including the police, the gendarmerie, and the regular army;

- Publicly declare that the government does not tolerate attacks on civilians and will bring to justice those responsible for pillage, murder, rape, and other serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law;
- Provide access to health and other services for victims of human rights violations, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls who have survived sexual violence;
- Investigate and prosecute all persons deemed responsible for the recent abuses, including Seleka members, in fair and credible trials that comply with international standards; and
- Establish the National Commission of Inquiry announced by Presidential Decree n° 13.040 on April 26, 2013, and enable it to promptly, thoroughly, and independently investigate allegations of human rights abuses by all parties, including, but not limited to, the Seleka rebels.

In addition, Human Rights Watch calls on the **United Nations (UN)** to urgently address the following:

- The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (Bureau intégré des Nations Unies pour la consolidation de la paix en République centrafricaine, BINUCA) should ensure that its Human Rights and Justice Unit effectively monitors and reports on past and ongoing human rights abuses in the Central African Republic;
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should deploy a monitoring mission to the Central African Republic to document, investigate, and report on human rights violations committed since December. The mission should include investigators that are trained to document sexual violence;
- The Human Rights Council should consider the report of the OHCHR investigation and appoint an independent expert on human rights in the Central African Republic at the council's session in June;
- The UN Security Council should bolster the mandate of the peace support mission's Human Rights and Justice Section when the mission's mandate is discussed this year; and
- Relevant UN bodies, including OHCHR and BINUCA, should provide assistance to the National Commission of Inquiry and urge the government to move forward with bringing to justice those responsible for abuses.

- Finally, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, should continue to closely monitor developments in the Central African Republic. Her office in 2007 opened an investigation in the country, following a referral by the Central African Republic government, which is a state party to the ICC. On April 22, Bensouda said that she was closely scrutinizing “allegations of crimes under the Court’s jurisdiction, including attacks against civilians, murder and pillaging in the Central African Republic.” Pillage, rape, and murder, including by summary execution, all constitute war crimes under the statute of the ICC.

Background

Roughly 5,000 Seleka fighters seized power from the Bozizé government in a coup on March 24 after a military offensive, in which they fought their way from northern Central African Republic to the capital, Bangui. The offensive followed the collapse of a power-sharing deal, the January 2013 Libreville Agreement, which created a unity government. Both the United Nations and African Union condemned the coup.

The Seleka coalition comprises at least four main armed rebel groups that have been operating in the northern part of the country since 2003: the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace, the Convention of Patriots of Salvation and Kodro, the Democratic Front of the Central African People, and the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity.

The Looting of Bangui

On March 23, the Seleka won a fierce battle against soldiers of the South African Defence Force, who were in the country under an arrangement between former President François Bozizé and President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, and were able to enter Bangui unhindered. Seleka troops immediately looted and pillaged the capital. One of the first targets was the Bangui Cathedral, where Seleka rebels entered the church, fired in the air, and robbed the worshipers.

Seleka members used violence against civilians during the looting. A man who was shot in the throat and survived told Human Rights Watch: “A Seleka fighter said, ‘Come give us the money’... I said that I had no money...he aimed his [gun] at me and shot once. The bullet

hit me right above my head on the right side. I thought to myself, ‘I am dead, this is it.’ He shot me again and the bullet hit me on my left shoulder and came out my throat.”

Human Rights Watch spoke with scores of people who reported the same outcome: everything was taken. As one witness told Human Rights Watch: “They took everything in the house, the bed, the mattresses, the clothes, everything with value. They only left my grandmother’s old bed. They even took the furniture in the living room.”

During the weekend of April 13 and 14, Seleka forces carried out an operation in the Boy-Rabe neighborhood, where some members of the former government’s security forces live. Multiple witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Seleka pickup trucks entered Boy-Rabe in the early hours of April 14, a Sunday. Seleka forces shot indiscriminately at civilians to make them flee before Seleka men looted their homes. One resident said: “I saw them shooting their guns at us, at the people. This is the technique of the Seleka, to come in and to pillage. If there are people there they will not hesitate to shoot to make people leave. Sometimes they kill people, sometimes not.”

Pillage and looting are strictly prohibited by international law and under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, “pillaging a town or place, even when taken by assault,” constitutes a war crime in non-international armed conflicts.

Summary Executions and Murder of Civilians by Seleka Members

Seleka forces also engaged in more indiscriminate shooting of civilians in Bangui neighborhoods, including Boy-Rabe and Ouango. A number of witnesses told Human Rights Watch that on April 14 they saw Seleka members shooting at three young unarmed men trying to flee the rebels. When the young men crossed a main road, one of them was shot in the head. Human Rights Watch received credible reports of numerous other civilians shot by Seleka troops in Boy-Rabe while trying to flee the approaching rebels. If civilians tried to prevent Seleka fighters from entering their homes or looting their property, the civilians were killed, witnesses said. On April 14, one resident of Boy-Rabe let other civilians who were fleeing armed Seleka members take shelter in his house. When the Seleka soldiers demanded to enter his house, the resident refused. He was shot twice in the chest and died a few minutes later.

The following day, Seleka men targeted the home of a man known to be a truck driver. Wanting his truck, Seleka fighters shot in the air and summoned him outside. He told Human Rights Watch: “They [The Seleka] stopped shooting and my wife approached the door. But they kicked it down and shot her. [Our] baby was in her arms and she was hit in the head, my wife was then hit in the head and in the chest.” Both the man’s wife and infant daughter died immediately. The Seleka troops then forced him to walk three kilometers to his truck and threatened to kill him if he could not start it.

Two high-ranking Seleka commanders told Human Rights Watch that the units in Boy-Rabe on April 13 and 14 were performing disarmament operations. But residents of Boy-Rabe said that there were neither Central African Armed Forces (FACA) elements, nor armed groups beyond the rebels, in the neighborhood. The Seleka forces, witnesses said, were not looking for weapons or seeking to disarm anyone, but were pillaging the community. After the looting in Boy-Rabe, Seleka forces summarily executed civilians around the Bangui area, particularly those assumed to be members of the army. In one incident on April 15, Seleka forces captured nine men from Boy-Rabe and Foh neighborhoods who were walking together, then summarily executed five of them.

Human Rights Watch interviewed three of the survivors. They said the Seleka fighters stopped the men as they walked toward Boy-Rabe and told them, “You are the Gbaya [ethnic group of the ousted president] and you are FACA,” and then forced them onto a pickup truck. On the truck, the Seleka combatants stabbed the men with knives. “They had made us lie down on our stomachs and they did not know what they were stabbing,” a survivor said. “They were happy and were saying, ‘Ha! You are military and we have you!’ When we cried out they stabbed us more.”

The nine men were driven through Bangui and at one point overheard a conversation between the Seleka soldiers in the truck and an officer who appeared to be a commander on the road where the pick-up had stopped. The commander asked who the men were, and the Seleka fighters said that they were FACA. The commander then said to take them away. The men were driven to the Mpoko River, southwest of Bangui, near the Bimbo neighborhood. They were forced to leave the truck and were marched to the river’s edge. After arranging the nine men in a line, the Seleka soldiers shot five of them. Their bodies fell into the water. “When they were being shot, I knew that it was over for me,” one survivor said.

It is unclear why the other four were not shot. Some of those interviewed said that a Seleka member from the southern part of the country asked the commander to spare them. The four survivors were eventually released and are seeking medical attention for their stab wounds, which Human Rights Watch saw. The men said they were not from the FACA. Seleka forces, witnesses said, also killed unarmed civilians on the Ngaragba Bridge in Bangui near the Ouango/Kassai neighborhoods. According to information gathered by Human Rights Watch, Seleka forces killed approximately 18 people at the Ngaragba Bridge and in the Ouango neighborhood on April 13.

On that day, Seleka elements drove recklessly in a vehicle onto the bridge and hit civilians walking with a coffin in a funeral procession toward the local cemetery. Enraged, civilians from the procession began to throw stones at the Seleka troops. Within minutes, additional Seleka forces arrived. They shot what witnesses said was a rocket-propelled grenade into the crowd and began shooting indiscriminately at civilians who were trying to flee the area and run to their homes toward Ouango. Human Rights Watch saw numerous Seleka vehicles loaded with rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

One witness told Human Rights Watch that he saw Seleka forces kill a priest who was appealing for calm: “[He] walked toward the Seleka elements on their pick-up raising a Bible in his hand and calling to stop shooting...[he] was shot dead by two Seleka fighters.” Another witness told Human Rights Watch that Seleka men shot at women and children: “After the Seleka convoy started shooting at the crowd, a woman with a baby on her back was walking down the street past the bridge, when she was shot by a Seleka fighter and left dead in the street with the baby crying on her back.”

At about 4 p.m. on April 12, according to eyewitnesses, a rocket-like weapon landed in a field in the Walingba neighborhood in Bangui, where children were playing soccer. Twelve children, ages 9 to 12, were seriously injured by the explosion, including three who had limbs amputated as a result.

Rape

Human Rights Watch was unable to estimate how many women and girls might have been raped by members of the Seleka, but researchers interviewed two rape survivors in Bangui, and the parents of a third. One rape survivor said:

The day after they captured Bangui, I was in my house, where I live with my younger sister ... when many Seleka fighters entered the quarter. I am 33-years-old and my sister is 23. She was 8 months pregnant when they raped us on March 25. They were shooting in the air in front of our house. Two armed men entered the house, threatened us, and forced us to get undressed and lay down on the ground....They both raped us, one after the other. They were shouting bad words in Sango and in Arabic. One of them was shouting the Arabic word charmouta (prostitute in Arabic) while raping me. Then, they left the house. Our neighbor took us to the community hospital, where my sister lost her baby the day after.

Another survivor, a mother of three children, was assaulted by Seleka fighters in her house during the attack on Boy Rabe on April 14:

I was at home with my children when a large number of armed men arrived on pick-up vehicles in front of my house. Three of them came into my house, pointed their kalash [Kalashnikov rifle] at me, tied me up in front of my children, and raped me. After they had raped me, they looted my house and left. I'm now alone with my children. My husband abandoned me the day after the rape. I feel pains in my body. I'm scared and have nothing left.

The parents of one rape survivor told Human Rights Watch that their daughter, age 14, was raped by Seleka forces after they looted the family's home. While the Seleka held the parents at gunpoint, one of the Seleka members took the daughter outside on the veranda and raped her. The parents could hear her crying. When finished, the Seleka told the parents, "We have done what we came to do."

Targeting FACA members

Following the success of the coup on March 24, many FACA members went into hiding in Bangui or abandoned their posts due to the prevailing insecurity and out of fear for their lives. Human Rights Watch documented several extrajudicial killings of FACA staff by Seleka members.

In one case, family members and witnesses said that the Seleka forced a man who had worked as a military chauffeur to drive vehicles to Chad. A few days after he had returned home, Seleka elements came to his home to kill him. They attacked his home, but initially the driver was able to flee through a window. The next day, however, Seleka forces captured him near the Kilo 5 neighborhood, approximately five kilometers northwest of Bangui. One witness told Human Rights Watch: “I saw him with my own eyes when he was sitting in the Seleka pickup. They had already started beating him....he did not want to show that he knew me. He was crying.” His body was found later by the Red Cross. He had been shot repeatedly.

In another case, witnesses told Human Rights Watch of a summary execution on April 17 in Bangui of a man who held the rank of sergeant in the FACA. The sergeant received a call from a man he knew to come to a meeting, but when the sergeant arrived, Seleka forces detained him.

Members of the man’s family visited police stations in the capital to try to find him. After searching for hours, the family heard that witnesses had found corpses outside of Bangui at the Sceaux Bridge, in an area known as PK 15, and went there. They found the sergeant’s body, which bore signs of torture as well as bullet and machete wounds. Witnesses who had been at the bridge told Human Rights Watch that the bodies of seven other FACA soldiers were found there.

Government Response

Human Rights Watch interviewed government officials representing the Seleka, including President Michel Djotodia, Public Security Minister Noureddine Adam, Waters and Forests Minister Mohamed Moussa Dhaffane, and Justice Minister Arsène Sende.

All of these leaders admitted that abuses took place in Bangui after the coalition seized the capital, but all claimed that the former regime’s military elements and pro-Bozizé militias carried out the looting and other human rights abuses. They said that approximately 100 “fake” Seleka fighters had been arrested and were being detained, awaiting charges.

A decree issued by Djotodia created a National Commission of Inquiry to investigate and report on crimes and human rights abuses committed in the entire country since 2002. Asked about this commission, the president and justice minister both said that the commission would be required to investigate abuses under the previous government as well as by Seleka troops since December 2012.



Halima (center), a 25-year-old Muslim woman, lives under the protection of the Catholic Church, after the anti-balaka militia slaughtered more than 80 Muslims in Bossemptele. Her husband and father-in-law were among the dead, and her three children had run away from the attackers, not to be heard from since. March 3, 2014.

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