



## Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Central African Republic, 74<sup>th</sup> plenary session

*December 2016*

### **Summary**

This submission focuses on abductions, killing, and maiming of children; the protection of education; sexual violence; and the rights of children with disabilities. It relates to Articles 2, 6, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 37, 38, and 39 of the Convention, and proposes issues and questions that Committee members may wish to raise with the government. Human Rights Watch has conducted extensive field research and documented grave child rights violations since 2013.<sup>1</sup>

### **Background**

On December 10, 2012, the Seleka, an alliance of predominantly Muslim rebel groups from the marginalized northeast of the Central African Republic, began a military campaign against the government.<sup>2</sup> The Seleka moved southwest into non-Muslim areas, killing thousands of civilians. On March 24, 2013, Seleka rebels took control of Bangui, the capital, and ousted President François Bozizé. Michel Djotodia, one of the Seleka leaders, suspended the constitution, and installed himself as interim president—a role to which he was subsequently appointed by the transitional government.<sup>3</sup> In August 2013, animist and Christian militia known as “anti-balaka,” in an attempt to seize power and retaliate against the Seleka, began to target Muslim residents and committed serious human rights violations.<sup>4</sup> President Djotodia dissolved the Seleka in September 2013. The Seleka were pushed out of Bangui and the southwest in early 2014 by African Union and French forces and established strongholds in the center and east. However, by October 2014, the Seleka had fractured into smaller groups, each controlling territory.

The Central African Republic has experienced ongoing fighting since 2013. Thousands of civilians have been killed by both sides, hundreds of thousands have fled their homes, and nearly half-a-million people have taken refuge in neighboring countries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Human Rights Watch’s research on the Central African Republic here: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/central-african-republic>.

<sup>2</sup> Seleka means “alliance” in Sango, the national language of the Central African Republic.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*They Came To Kill*” *Escalating Atrocities in the Central African Republic*, December 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/12/18/they-came-kill/escalating-atrocities-central-african-republic#44aa12>.

<sup>4</sup> The term “anti-balaka” means “anti-balles,” or bullet, from a Kalashnikov assault rifle

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*I Can Still Smell the Dead*” *The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic*, September 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/09/18/i-can-still-smell-dead/forgotten-human-rights-crisis-central-african-republic>; “*They Came To Kill*,” “Central African Republic: Deadly Raid on Displaced People, UN Peacekeepers Should Offer Increased Protection,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/central-african-republic-deadly-raid-displaced-people>.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an armed group originally from Uganda, extended its activities into the Central African Republic from 2008 onwards and has also committed human rights violations.<sup>6</sup> Reports of alleged kidnapping by the LRA increased in 2016.

### **Abductions, killing, and maiming of children (Articles 6, 35, and 38)**

Human Rights Watch has documented attacks by Seleka and anti-balaka that targeted civilians and killed and maimed many children since the coup.<sup>7</sup> For example, on April 12, 2013, a Seleka rocket attack in the Walingba neighbourhood of Bangui injured 13 children, two of whom required amputations.<sup>8</sup> Between April 13 and 14, Seleka forces attacked Boy-Rabe neighborhood in Bangui. Among the three fatalities and 13 injuries were three boys, ages 4, 5, and 8, who were maimed and required amputations.<sup>9</sup>

On September 6, 2013, Muslims fled into the bush following an anti-balaka attack on Zéré, a major trading center on the Bossangoa-Bouca road. The area chief's wife's three-year-old son was wounded by a machete, her 14-year-old daughter was abducted and remained missing almost two months later, and her co-wife and co-wife's 3-year-old daughter were also missing.<sup>10</sup>

On September 6, 2013, nine children, ages 6 months to 16 years old, had their throats slit in an anti-balaka attack on Bodora village, northeast of Bossangoa. On September 6, 2013, anti-balaka attacked a cattle camp and cut the throats of all the males. A woman told Human Rights Watch, "The others were just children: Bouba Keriyo, 14, Tahirou Keriyo, 10, and Khalidou Ngadjo, 3. Even the children had their throats cut. My daughter Habiba, 3, was hit on her head with a machete, and cut all over her back with knives—she was in her father's hands so they thought she was a boy."<sup>11</sup> A 13-year-old boy was killed by gunfire in an anti-balaka attack on Votovo village, 15 kilometers south of Bossangoa, on September 26, 2013. Following the attack, 21 Muslim women and children were missing. None had been found in early November 2013, and were presumed dead by their relatives.<sup>12</sup>

On January 14, 2014, at least eight Muslims fleeing Boyali, a town 120 kilometers north of Bangui, were stopped by Christian militias at a checkpoint. Three women and three children were hacked to death with machetes on the steps of a mosque. On June 23, 2014, children were among a group of at least 20 people killed by anti-balaka in the Peuhl community at Ardondjobdi in the center of the country. The majority were killed by machete blows to the head and neck. One survivor said anti-balaka fighters pushed his wife and 18-month-old son into a burning house.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Questions and Answers on the LRA Commander Dominic Ongwen and the ICC," January 9, 2015 (updated January 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/09/questions-and-answers-lra-commander-dominic-ongwen-and-icc>.

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, "*I Can Still Smell the Dead*;" "*They Came To Kill*."

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, "*I Can Still Smell the Dead*."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Human Rights Watch, "*They Came To Kill*."

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Central African Republic: Muslims Forced to Flee, Christian Militias Unleash Waves of Targeted Violence," Human Rights Watch news release, February 12, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/12/central-african-republic-muslims-forced-flee>.

On October 12, 2016, Seleka forces, possibly with assistance from Muslim civilians, shot, stabbed, or burned to death civilians when they razed a camp for displaced people. A 23-year-old man told Human Rights Watch that his 17-year-old wife and two-month-old child had been shot in the stomach and head respectively. His three-year-old sister-in-law, who also died, looked like she had been shot in the leg. A six-year-old boy was shot dead and a fifteen-year-old boy stabbed to death.<sup>14</sup>

*Human Rights Watch recommends the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- Issue a public declaration that the government will not tolerate attacks on civilians and will hold accountable anyone found responsible for abducting, killing, and maiming of civilians and other serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Provide full cooperation to the United Nations to ensure civilian protection.
- Take concrete action towards ensuring accountability for these crimes, including:
  - Re-establishing judicial structures;
  - Operationalizing the Special Criminal Court so that investigations and prosecutions of the gravest crimes since 2003, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, can be prosecuted.

### **Education (Articles 23, 28, 29, and 38)**

In 2012, the net primary enrollment rate was estimated to be 71 percent and the net secondary enrollment rate was estimated to be 14 percent.<sup>15</sup> Prior to 2013, the education system was fragile and there were problems with access to and quality of education and a lack of teachers and classrooms.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Attacks on students, teachers, and schools*

According to United Nations documentation, Human Rights Watch research, and research conducted by other nongovernmental organizations, attacks on students, teachers, and schools by Seleka and anti-balaka took place between 2012 and 2016.<sup>17</sup>

Human Rights Watch documented cases where armed groups attacked schools, students, and teachers and looted and destroyed school infrastructure and materials, such as books and desks from 2008-2013.<sup>18</sup> In October 2013, Human Rights Watch found that many schools around

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<sup>14</sup> “Central African Republic: Deadly Raid on Displaced People, UN Peacekeepers Should Offer Increased Protection,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/central-african-republic-deadly-raid-displaced-people>.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, “Country Profile – Central African Republic,” undated, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=CAF&regioncode=40540> (accessed November 21, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Global Partnership For Education, “Central African Republic,” undated, <http://www.globalpartnership.org/country/central-african-republic> (accessed November 21, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education From Attack (GCPEA), “Education Under Attack 2014, Country Profiles, Central African Republic,” 2014, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/country-profile/central-african-republic> (accessed November 15, 2016); Human Rights Watch, “*I Can Still Smell the Dead*,” “*They Came To Kill*,” United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the Secretary-General: Children and Armed Conflict,” April 20, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360) (accessed November 11, 2016); Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Vulnerable Students, Unsafe Schools: Attacks and Military Use of Schools in the Central African Republic,” September 2015, [http://watchlist.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2144-Watchlist-CAR\\_EN\\_LR.pdf](http://watchlist.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2144-Watchlist-CAR_EN_LR.pdf) (accessed November 15, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Schools and Armed Conflict, A Global Survey of Domestic Laws and State Practice Protecting Schools from Attack and Military Use*, July 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/07/20/schools-and-armed-conflict/global-survey-domestic-laws-and-state-practice>; *I Can Still Smell the Dead*,” p. 10, p. 37, pp. 40-41; “*They Came To Kill*,” p. 32, p. 34.

Bossangoa were abandoned or not operating, or were used by displaced persons for shelter. Schools visited by Human Rights Watch in Ndjo, Zéré, and Ouham-Bac had been systematically looted of essential supplies, such as books, desks, official records, and metal roofs, by Seleka.<sup>19</sup>

On October 12, 2016, Seleka fighters attacked a school in Kaga-Bandoro, where a teacher training course was being held. Fifteen men entered the school courtyard armed with knives and grenades. They followed those who attempted to flee from the school premises into the surrounding neighborhood, shooting at them directly. They captured one teacher and stabbed him to death. Another teacher, the director of the training center, was killed when the Seleka found him nearby.<sup>20</sup>

### *Military use of schools*

Between December 2008 and June 2011, government forces and non-state armed groups used or occupied schools in the Central African Republic. According to United Nations documentation, Human Rights Watch research, and research conducted by other nongovernmental organizations, Seleka and anti-balaka occupied schools for military purposes between 2012 and 2016.<sup>21</sup> At least 20 schools were occupied or used by non-state actors and four were occupied or used by military forces, between December 2012 and August 2013 in Bamingui-Bangoran, Kémo, Ombella-M'Poko, Bangui, Haute-Kotto, Nana-Grébizi, and Ouaka prefectures. Many of these schools reported looting and damage.<sup>22</sup>

### *Access to education for displaced children with disabilities in humanitarian contexts*

Conflict and displacement are particularly disruptive for children with disabilities who are unable to attend school or receive education in an inclusive manner. In 2015, Human Rights Watch found that very few children with disabilities were enrolled in schools in camps like the M'Poko camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bangui.<sup>23</sup> Of the nearly 3,800 children enrolled at the school in M'Poko, only 14 had disabilities. While the school itself was wheelchair-accessible, the route to the school was not. Children with physical disabilities need a family member to drop them to school and pick them up, and they must have an assistive device. Without an assistive device, such as a wheelchair, children with physical disabilities can find it hard to sit all day on the floor.<sup>24</sup> School staff told Human Rights Watch that some parents are hesitant to send children with physical disabilities to school as they fear that their children will not be able to flee in case of an attack.

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<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Came To Kill*,” p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> “Central African Republic: Deadly Raid on Displaced People, UN Peacekeepers Should Offer Increased Protection,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/central-african-republic-deadly-raid-displaced-people>.

<sup>21</sup> GCPEA, “Education Under Attack 2014, Country Profiles, Central African Republic,” 2014, <http://www.protectingeducation.org/country-profile/central-african-republic> (accessed November 15, 2016), Human Rights Watch, *“I Can Still Smell the Dead;” “They Came To Kill;”* United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the Secretary-General: Children and Armed Conflict,” April 20, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360) (accessed November 11, 2016); Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, “Vulnerable Students, Unsafe Schools: Attacks and Military Use of Schools in the Central African Republic.”

<sup>22</sup> Central African Republic Education Cluster, “A step back: The impact of the recent crisis on education in Central African Republic - A Joint education assessment,” September 2013, [http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/a\\_step\\_back.pdf](http://www.protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/a_step_back.pdf), (accessed November 13, 2016), p.24.

<sup>23</sup> “Central African Republic: People With Disabilities Left Behind, Aid Agencies Should Include Them in Planning; Meet Basic Needs,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 28, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-left-behind>.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“Leave No One Behind,”* pp. 19-20.

Children with sensory or intellectual disabilities are unable to attend because the school does not have teachers trained in inclusive methods. The school staff has not actively sought to enroll children with disabilities.<sup>25</sup>

Human Rights Watch congratulates the Central African Republic for endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration on July 23, 2015.

*Human Rights Watch recommends the Committee ask the government:*

- What steps has the government taken to implement the Safe Schools Declaration and the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* into domestic policy and operational frameworks?
- How many schools, universities, or education facilities have been damaged or destroyed as a result of attacks by a) state security forces and b) non-state armed groups in each year of the reporting period, and since?
- What action has the government taken to prevent attacks by non-state armed groups on schools and universities and to mitigate their impact when they do occur?
- How many schools, universities, or education facilities have been fully or partially occupied or used by a) government security forces and b) non-state armed groups in each year of the reporting period, and since?
- What action has the government taken to ensure that attacks on schools in contravention of international humanitarian law are investigated so that those responsible can be duly prosecuted?
- What measures is the government putting in place to ensure all children displaced by conflict are able to safely access a quality education on an equal basis?

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- Take all necessary and appropriate steps to permit school-age children to return to school, including responding to attacks on schools by promptly repairing damage, rebuilding schools, and ensuring that students can safely return to class.
- Take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools, following UN Security Council Resolutions 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015), including by bringing *the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* into domestic military policy and operational frameworks, as per the commitment made in the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Operationalize the Special Criminal Court and investigate and appropriately prosecute individuals responsible for involvement in the range of violations of international law that constitute attacks on education, including as a matter of command responsibility.
- With the support of humanitarian agencies and donors, ensure the provision of education in crises and displacement, and adopt special measures to ensure children can continue their education in highly insecure areas, including by reducing the distance to school, offering distance learning programs, and setting up protective learning spaces for girls and teachers.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

- Guarantee access to inclusive and quality education for children with all types of disabilities in mainstream schools by training teachers in inclusive methods and making schools fully accessible.

### **Child soldiers (Articles 38 and 39)**

The recruitment and the use of children in armed conflict continues to be a significant concern. Human Rights Watch documented the recruitment and use of child soldiers amongst rebel groups including the Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and of Democracy, the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity in 2007, and the Seleka and anti-balaka since 2013.<sup>26</sup>

In 2015, the UN documented 40 cases of child recruitment and use, 21 of which were by the LRA and 13 by the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic, a former Seleka faction. Children were used as combatants, messengers, informants, and cooks, while girls were also used as sex slaves. The military leader of former Seleka faction, the Central African Patriotic Movement, said 43 children were in his group.<sup>27</sup>

*Human Rights Watch recommends the Committee ask the government:*

- What steps has the government taken to end child recruitment and to pressure armed groups to do so?

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- End all recruitment and use of children and set out any steps it has taken to do so.
- When disarming and releasing children, work with child protection agencies to transfer children to appropriate civilian rehabilitation and reintegration programs that include educational and vocational training as well as necessary counselling, in accordance with the 2007 Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.
- Call on non-state armed groups to end all recruitment and use of children. All groups that have been listed by the United Nations Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict should develop plans to address grave violations against children.

### **Sexual violence in conflict (Articles 19 and 34)**

Human Rights Watch has significant concerns about the use of sexual violence against women and girls by Seleka and anti-balaka, as well as a lack of comprehensive post-rape medical and psychosocial care and access to justice, and the impact of stigma and rejection on survivors. Human Rights Watch has documented the cases of at least 35 girls, ages 10-17, who said that members of primarily the Seleka and anti-balaka<sup>28</sup> raped them and 9 who said that members of the armed

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<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, *State of Anarchy, Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians*, September 2007, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/09/14/state-anarchy/rebellion-and-abuses-against-civilians>; *"I Can Still Smell the Dead;" "They Came To Kill."*

<sup>27</sup> United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Secretary-General: Children and Armed Conflict," April 20, 2016, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/360) (accessed November 11, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch also documented a case where a Peuhl group from Kouï, "Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation," known as 3R raped a girl.

groups held them in conditions amounting to sexual slavery between 2013 and mid-2016.<sup>2930</sup> Incidents occurred primarily in and around Bangui, Boda, Bambari, Mbres, and Kaga Bandoro. Three additional girls said that members of the armed groups physically assaulted them or committed attempted rape; one of these girls said the armed men tied her up and held her at a base for several hours.

Girls told Human Rights Watch that they were forced to endure repeated rapes, often by multiple perpetrators, and held in captivity for periods ranging from days to 18 months. Girls also said that fighters beat and whipped them, tied them up with rope, forced them to do domestic work, and humiliated them. Some said they witnessed members of armed groups killing their family members.

Both Seleka and anti-balaka fighters assaulted girls as punishment for alleged alliances with the opposing armed group. Sandrine, 16 at the time, said that three members of the Seleka accused her of supporting the anti-balaka when they raped her in Bangui in December 2013.<sup>31</sup> Caroline, aged 16 or 17 at the time, said that anti-balaka took her in the Boda area in 2013 and held her at their base for several days alongside approximately 10 to 15 other girls. She said they threatened to kill her if she did not allow them to sleep with her.<sup>32</sup>

Survivors face significant barriers to accessing health and psychosocial services. In addition to stigma and rejection, inaccessibility of, lack of awareness about, and financial burdens associated with services deter survivors from seeking care. When survivors do access services, care is not always comprehensive or sensitive to survivors' needs.

Access to post-rape medical care, including post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV and emergency contraception, and access to safe abortion remain problematic for survivors. At least two of the girls Human Rights Watch interviewed became pregnant as a result of sexual violence by armed groups. Another survivor, who was 14 when anti-balaka captured her, said that she had a clandestine abortion to terminate the pregnancy.

In some cases, sexual violence impacted access to education. Patricia, 15, was held and raped by anti-balaka at a base in Bangui in March 2016. The stigma keeps her from returning to school after her grandmother told a classmate's family.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In some cases, Human Rights Watch interviewed family members instead of or as well as young survivors. In all interviews, Human Rights Watch observed informed consent procedures and researchers took steps to avoid re-traumatization of interviewees; in cases of child survivors, this often meant not asking them to describe incidents of sexual violence in detail.

<sup>30</sup> Because some interviewees could not provide their ages and many could not provide information about the dates of their attacks, in some cases Human Rights Watch could not confirm whether some survivors were under 18 when the violence occurred. In other cases, Human Rights Watch had reason to believe that interviewees had experienced sexual violence based on information provided by relatives or service providers, but survivors may have chosen not to disclose the violence to Human Rights Watch. This number is therefore approximate and may be higher than indicated here.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Sandrine (pseudonym), Bangui, January 23, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Caroline (pseudonym), Boda, April 28, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Patricia, Bangui, May 5, 2016.

Barriers to justice also remain. A dearth of resources, lack of infrastructure, and inadequate capacity hamper the judicial system, and a history of relative impunity for gender-based violence fosters skepticism about treatment of sexual violence in criminal proceedings. These and other barriers, including the inability to identify perpetrators, poor response from police and other security sector representatives, and lack of financial resources or legal assistance, prevented survivors from reporting cases to authorities or seeking justice.

Human Rights Watch also documented four cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of girls by UN peacekeepers in the eastern city of Bambari.<sup>34</sup> These cases, which occurred between October and December 2015, included rape, gang rape, and provision of food and money in exchange for sex, all of which violates the UN's own "zero tolerance" policy on SEA. Only one of the survivors had received any medical or psychosocial care prior to speaking with Human Rights Watch.<sup>35</sup>

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- Take concrete action to end impunity for sexual violence, including by:
  - Operationalizing the Special Criminal Court and ensuring that the court investigates and prosecutes crimes of sexual violence in conflict;
  - Re-establishing judicial structures and ensuring that investigative police, prosecutors, and judges have the resources, training, and capacity necessary to investigate crimes of sexual violence in conflict and to detain and prosecute perpetrators.
- Ensure availability of free, comprehensive post-rape medical and psychosocial care, including PEP, emergency contraception, and access to abortion for survivors of sexual violence in both urban and rural areas, as well as training of all medical staff in response to sexual violence and referral mechanisms.
- Conduct educational and awareness-raising activities to increase understanding of how, where and why to access post-rape services in a timely manner, and to address attitudes that contribute to stigma and rejection of sexual violence survivors.
- Cooperate with the UN to ensure timely investigation of peacekeeper abuses and service provision for survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, and to strengthen protection measures to mitigate the risks of sexual violence and SEA.

### **The Rights of Children in Armed Conflict (Articles 24, 27, 37, 38, 39)**

Children are affected by armed conflict in unique ways and a number of their rights are impacted. In addition to those violations set out above, Human Rights Watch documented the deliberate destruction of property by armed groups, with villages razed to the ground in some cases. At the height of the conflict, some of the population—including children—had to flee their homes and live

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<sup>34</sup> "Central African Republic: Rape by Peacekeepers," Human Rights Watch news release, February 4, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/04/central-african-republic-rape-peacekeepers>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

in wooded areas near their fields and homes. Most had no access to clean water.<sup>36</sup> Children died as a consequence of fleeing fighting (for example, two children, ages 2 and 8, drowned in the Ouham River while fleeing in panic) and of poor health, hunger, and exposure to the elements.<sup>37</sup> In one instance, in Yaloke, at least 26 children were among 53 people who died from malnutrition, respiratory illnesses, and other diseases as a result of the dire living conditions and lack of access to health care there.<sup>38</sup>

Children have also been held captive, alongside adults, by anti-balaka fighters. For example, over 90 Muslim Peuhl herders, including many women and girls, were held captive in the southwest, during 2014 and 2015. One family told Human Rights Watch in April 2015 that they had been held for 14 months in the village of Pondo. The anti-balaka killed two boys, ages about 6 and 7, and raped three young women and girls, one of whom became ill and died in captivity. Her one-year-old baby died of malnutrition.

*Human Rights Watch recommends the Committee ask the government:*

- What steps has the government taken to provide for the medical, psychological, and social needs of children affected by armed conflict?
- What steps has the government taken to work with humanitarian agencies to provide for the medical, psychological, and social needs of children affected by armed conflict?

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- Facilitate access by humanitarian agencies to provide food, medicine, shelter, and other essentials to displaced and at-risk populations.
- Work with humanitarian agencies to ensure support for the medical, psychological, and social needs of children affected by armed conflict.

### **Children with disabilities in humanitarian contexts (Articles 2, 23, 24, 28, 29)**

Children with disabilities face unique challenges during humanitarian emergencies, including abandonment and neglect; a lack of information or awareness about attacks, sometimes due to their disability; and a lack of assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, tricycles, or crutches, to assist in fleeing.

Human Rights Watch found that people with disabilities, including children, were often left behind and struggled to flee to safety when their communities came under attack by different armed groups. For example, Hamamatou, a 13-year-old polio survivor from the town of Guen in southwestern Central African Republic, was carried by her brother following an assault on their

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<sup>36</sup> “Central African Republic: Rampant Abuses After Coup, New Government Should Rein in Ex-Rebel Forces,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 10, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/central-african-republic-rampant-abuses-after-coup>; Human Rights Watch, “*I Can Still Smell the Dead*; “*They Came To Kill*,”; “Central African Republic: Deadly Raid on Displaced People, UN Peacekeepers Should Offer Increased Protection,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/central-african-republic-deadly-raid-displaced-people>.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*I Can Still Smell the Dead*.”

<sup>38</sup> “Central African Republic: People With Disabilities Left Behind, Aid Agencies Should Include Them in Planning; Meet Basic Needs,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 28 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-left-behind>.

village. As he grew too tired to continue, Hamamatou begged him to leave her and save his own life. When anti-balaka combatants found her two weeks later, Hamamatou told Human Rights Watch, “The [rebel] fighters said, ‘We have found an animal. Let’s finish it off.’” Another fighter intervened to save her life. In March and April 2014, Human Rights Watch found that at least 17 people with disabilities, mostly children who had survived polio, were left behind when more than 1,500 Muslim survivors fled the city of Bossemptélé in commercial trucks.<sup>39</sup>

Human Rights Watch conducted research in camps for IDPs in the Central African Republic in January and April 2015 and found that, once people with disabilities, including children, reach these camps, they often lack equal access to basic services, such as food, health care, and sanitation.<sup>40</sup>

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to call upon the government to:*

- Include persons with disabilities in data collection.
- Work with humanitarian agencies to ensure children with disabilities are fully included in the humanitarian response, both in terms of protection and assistance, on an equal basis with others, and allow them to fully enjoy their rights. This includes providing equal access to basic services such as food and water, health care, assistive devices, housing, sanitation, education, information, and other basic necessities.
- Consult persons with disabilities and include their representative organizations in decision-making. Support local organizations of persons with disabilities.

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<sup>39</sup> “Central African Republic: People With Disabilities Left Behind, Aid Agencies Should Include Them in Planning; Meet Basic Needs,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 28 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/04/28/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-left-behind>.

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*Leave No-One Behind.*”