



**Submission by Human Rights Watch to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 63rd plenary session concerning the Central African Republic**  
*February 2018*

## **Summary**

This submission focuses on the protection of education during armed conflict, sexual violence against women and girls, and the rights of persons with disabilities in humanitarian contexts. It relates to Articles 2, 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Human Rights Watch has conducted extensive field research and documented grave human rights violations in the Central African Republic since 2013.<sup>1</sup> This includes research conducted as the conflict worsened in 2013,<sup>2</sup> and in November 2016 and January 2017 concerning the occupation of schools for military purposes. Further information on this topic can be found in our report, [No Class: When Armed Groups Use Schools in the Central African Republic](#).<sup>3</sup> This submission also contains evidence from research conducted on the subject of sexual violence against women and girls by armed groups between July 2015 and August 2017. Further information can be found in our report, [“They Said We Are Their Slaves,” Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic](#).<sup>4</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>5</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, a Seleka leader, suspended the constitution, and installed himself as interim president—a role to which he was subsequently appointed by the transitional government.<sup>6</sup> In August 2013, animist and Christian militia known as “anti-balaka,” in an attempt to seize power

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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> 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>; 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>.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Class: When Armed Groups Use Schools in the Central African Republic*, March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/03/23/no-class/when-armed-groups-use-schools-central-african-republic>.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, *“They Said We Are Their Slaves,” Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic*, October 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/10/05/they-said-we-are-their-slaves/sexual-violence-armed-groups-central-african#487ea9>.

<sup>5</sup> Seleka means “alliance” in Sango, the national language of the Central African Republic.

<sup>6</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>; ; Human Rights Watch, *Killing Without Consequence, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic*, July 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/07/05/killing-without-consequence/war-crimes-crimes-against-humanity-and-special>.

and retaliate against the Seleka, began to target Muslim residents and committed serious human rights violations.<sup>7</sup> 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. These groups include the Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique*, FPRC), Central African Patriotic Movement (*Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique*, MPC), Patriotic Rally for the Renewal of Central Africa (Rassemblement Patriotique pour la Réconciliation des Centrafricains, RPRC), and Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (*l'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique*, UPC). The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), an armed group originally from Uganda, also extended its activities into the Central African Republic from 2008 onwards and has committed human rights abuses.<sup>8</sup> In June and October 2017, numerous armed groups signed ceasefire agreements. The accord commits the parties to end their hostilities and to recognize the election of President Faustin-Archang Touadera in 2016. Much of the country remains insecure, unstable, and beset with serious human rights violations. Armed groups still control key towns, despite the presence of United Nations peacekeepers.<sup>9</sup>

## Education (Articles 13, 14)

### *The Protection of Education During Armed Conflict*

#### *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>10</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>11</sup> In October 2013, Human Rights Watch found that many schools around

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<sup>7</sup> The term “anti-balaka” means “anti-balles,” or bullet, from a Kalashnikov assault rifle.

<sup>8</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>9</sup> 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>; “Central African Republic: People with Disabilities at High Risk, 4 Years into Conflict, More Support, Protection Needed,” June 21, 2017,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/21/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-high-risk>; Human Rights Watch, *Killing Without Consequence, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and the Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic*, July 2017,

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/07/05/killing-without-consequence/war-crimes-crimes-against-humanity-and-special>; “Human Rights Watch World Report, Central African Republic,” January 2018, New York, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/central-african-republic>.

<sup>10</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*”; 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); Cluster Education en République Centrafricaine, “A Step Back: The Impact of the Recent Crisis on Education in the Central African Republic,” 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 January 5, 2018); United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the Secretary-General: Children and Armed Conflict,” August 24, 2017, <http://undocs.org/A/72/361> (accessed January 3, 2018).

<sup>11</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>12</sup> The United Nations recorded eight attacks on schools and protected personnel by the LRA, MPC, RPRC, the FPRC/MPC coalition, and anti-balaka elements in 2016. This included the killing of three schoolteachers in October by elements of the FPRC/MPC coalition who invaded a school in Kaga-Bandoro and the stabbing of one teacher by ex-Séléka elements in Bamou.<sup>13</sup>

Human Rights Watch found that in July 2016 an anti-balaka fighter beat a teacher who tried to stop him from burning a school desk in the town of Sekia-Dalliet, Lobaye province. “One day an anti-balaka fighter was taking a desk to burn and I had had enough,” the teacher said, explaining that, at the time, anti-balaka fighters had been occupying the school for 22 months. “I ran up and told him to stop. I told him to put down the desk because it was for the kids. He pulled out a knife and hit me in the head. I was taken to the hospital immediately.”<sup>14</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>15</sup>

### *The Use of Schools for Military Purposes*

The use of schools for military purposes such as barracks, bases, and detention centers during the conflict continues to be of concern, threatening children’s safety and education. According to United Nations documentation, Human Rights Watch research, and research conducted by other nongovernmental organizations, government forces and non-state armed groups, including Seleka and anti-balaka fighters, occupied schools for military purposes between 2012 and 2017.<sup>16</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 the Bamingui-Bangoran, Kémo, Ombella-M’Poko, Bangui, Haute-Kotto, Nana-Grébizi, and Ouaka prefectures. Many of these schools reported looting and damage.<sup>17</sup> The UN recorded 36 cases of the military use of schools, most

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<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch, *They Came To Kill*,” p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict,” A/72/361–S/2017/821, August 24, 2017, <http://undocs.org/A/72/361> (accessed January 31, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with teacher (name withheld), Sekia-Dalliet, January 17, 2017.

<sup>15</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>16</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,” Human Rights Watch, *No Class*; United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict,” A/72/361–S/2017/821, August 24, 2017, <http://undocs.org/A/72/361> (accessed January 31, 2018).

<sup>17</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.

perpetrated by Seleka groups, from late 2012 to February 2016.<sup>18</sup> In 2016, the UN found that 22 schools were used by armed groups that claimed that the facilities were disused. Following the publication of press releases by the UN in September condemning the practice, the MPC and FDPC vacated six schools. The UPC and FRPC vacated three other schools but these were later reused.<sup>19</sup>

In November 2016 and January 2017, Human Rights Watch visited 12 schools in the Lobaye, Nana Grébizi, Nana-Mambéré, Ouaka, Ouham, and Ouham-Pendé provinces that were either occupied by an armed group, had previously been occupied by an armed group, or the group was in the immediate area, preventing students from attending school. Eight of these schools were either occupied or continued to be affected by the occupation of Seleka fighters from the UPC, MPC, or FPRC. Human Rights Watch also found that anti-balaka fighters have also occupied and damaged schools, and that, in two cases, United Nations peacekeepers used a school as a base, in violation of UN regulations. The UN forces left both schools after Human Rights Watch informed UN officials.<sup>20</sup>

Human Rights Watch found that Seleka and anti-balaka fighters had occupied, looted, and damaged school buildings. This was particularly prevalent in the central and eastern provinces where fighting continues. Some schools were operational, but teachers and parents stated that there were frequent closures, which prevented children from attending class.<sup>21</sup> In ten of the twelve schools visited by Human Rights Watch, desks had been burned as firewood. In some instances, reading materials were deliberately destroyed.<sup>22</sup> In December 2016, fighters from the UPC executed 25 people after calling them to a school in the town of Bakala for an alleged meeting.<sup>23</sup> In January 2017, a school official from Sekia-Dalliet, where the primary school was occupied by anti-balaka fighters from late 2014 to October 2016, stated that his school was still suffering the consequences of the occupation. The fighters had destroyed desks and chairs, used the school grounds as their toilet, and used the desks for firewood and destroyed at least 75 of them.<sup>24</sup>

The close proximity of fighters to school grounds also restricts the ability of students to attend class. Sometimes students do not attend school despite the fact the school is operational because parents and children are too scared. In four cases documented by Human Rights Watch in January 2017, fighters were located near the school grounds, and several parents stated they were too afraid to send their children to school because of such proximity. In some cases, parents and families are reluctant for their children to return to school even when armed groups have left.<sup>25</sup> One student, a 15-year-old girl, told Human Rights Watch: “I am scared of the Seleka in front of my school. They look at me with red eyes when I pass. Some of them smoke drugs and it makes me scared. I have not

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<sup>18</sup> UN Security Council, Report of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Central African Republic, February 12, 2016, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/133](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/133) para. 35.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict,” A/72/361–S/2017/821, August 24, 2017, <http://undocs.org/A/72/361> (accessed January 31, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Class*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

<sup>23</sup> “Central African Republic: Executions by Rebel Group,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 16, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with official (name withheld), Sekia-Dalliet, January 17, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch, *No Class*, pp. 25–27.

studied since 2013. I have lost years. I want to return to school, but the presence of the Seleka means it is not possible.”<sup>26</sup>

Human Rights Watch welcomes the Central African Republic’s endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration on July 23, 2015. This was an important step that spurred the UN peacekeeping mission in the country, MINUSCA, to begin clearing schools occupied by militias.<sup>27</sup> The government has the primary responsibility to ensure that communities have the resources to repair and rebuild schools that have been damaged due to fighting. This effort will require close collaboration with international partners.

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

- What steps has the Central African Republic taken in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2143 (2014) and 2225 (2015) to deter the use of schools for military purposes?
- Are protections for schools from military use included in any policies, rules, or pre-deployment trainings for Central African Republic’s armed forces?
- What steps has Central African Republic taken to implement the commitments in the Safe Schools Declaration?

*Human Rights Watch asks the Committee to:*

- Congratulate the Central African Republic for having endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.
- Call upon the government to take concrete measures to deter the military use of schools, including by requesting assistance from the UN peacekeeping mission to oblige armed groups to vacate schools and school grounds.
- Call upon the government to incorporate the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* into domestic military policy and operational frameworks.
- Ensure that students deprived of educational facilities as a result of conflict are promptly given access to alternative suitable facilities while their own schools are repaired. Request assistance from UN agencies and humanitarian actors in this regard.
- Investigate attacks against students, teachers, and schools, and hold those responsible to account.

### ***Sexual Violence against Women and Girls (Articles 2, 3, 6, 12, 13)***

#### ***Sexual Violence by Armed Groups***

Human Rights Watch has documented pervasive sexual violence against women and girls by armed groups in the Central African Republic, in violation of the Covenant’s principles of non-discrimination and equal rights of men and women.<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch is also concerned about

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<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with student (name withheld), Mbrès, January 21, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA/OSRSG/046/2015, December 24, 2015; Human Rights Watch, *No Class*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> International bodies have established that gender-based violence, or “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately,” constitutes a form of discrimination. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), General Recommendation 19, Violence against Women (Eleventh session, 1992), Compilation of General Recommendations and General Comments adopted,

a lack of health and socio-economic services for survivors, which hinders fulfillment of their rights to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, to work, and to education.

In interviews with 296 female survivors (257 women and 39 girls) of violence by Seleka and anti-balaka, Human Rights Watch documented 305 cases of rape and sexual slavery that occurred between January 2013 and May 2017.<sup>29</sup> Survivors interviewed by Human Rights Watch in Bangui, Bambari, Boda, and Kaga-Bandoro described how fighters subjected them to violent and often repeated rape.

In most cases, survivors said that multiple perpetrators raped them—sometimes 10 men or more during a single incident. The rapes of these women and girls constitute torture as does the infliction of additional physical abuse during the rapes resulting in grave injuries such as broken bones and smashed teeth, internal injuries and head trauma. Perpetrators also tortured women and girls by whipping them, tying them up for prolonged periods, burning them, and threatening them with death. Sexual slavery survivors were held captive for up to 18 months, repeatedly raped—some taken as fighters’ “wives”—and forced to cook, clean, and collect food or water.

In many cases, survivors said their attackers used sexual violence as a form of retribution for perceived support of those on the other side of the sectarian divide. Members of armed groups aggravated the humiliation by raping some women and girls in front of their husbands, children, and other family members.

At times, rape formed an integral part of armed assaults and was used as a weapon of war. Members of armed groups committed rape during attacks on towns and villages, sometimes during door-to-door searches for men and boys. Seleka and anti-balaka fighters also attacked women and girls as they carried out essential tasks such as going to markets, cultivating or harvesting crops, and going to and from school or work.

For almost all survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed, sexual violence resulted in long-term consequences, including illness and injury, unwanted pregnancy, stigma and abandonment, and loss of livelihoods or access to education.

Some faced incapacitating physical injury and illness, including HIV and, in one case, a traumatic brain injury. Others became pregnant from rape, and now some also face emotional and financial challenges in raising children resulting from those pregnancies. Mental health consequences are no less dire. Women and girls described symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress and depression, including suicidal thoughts, fear and anxiety, sleeplessness, and an inability to complete daily tasks. Unable to continue work or other activities for sustenance, many said they are struggling to resume their lives and support themselves and their families. Girls sometimes dropped

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[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1\\_Global/INT\\_CEDAW\\_GEC\\_3731\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CEDAW_GEC_3731_E.pdf) (accessed August 18, 2017), paras. 6, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*They Said We Are Their Slaves*”: *Sexual Violence by Armed Groups in the Central African Republic*, October 2017.

out of school due to fear of repeated violence, risk of stigma, or continued insecurity or displacement.

Significant barriers to accessing health and psychosocial services include risk of stigma and rejection, inaccessibility of and lack of awareness about services, and financial burdens associated with these services deter survivors from seeking care. Only 145 of the 296 sexual violence survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed had accessed any post-rape medical care due to a range of obstacles, such as a lack of medical facilities, cost of travel to such facilities, and fear of stigma and rejection. Largely due to fear of stigma and abandonment, only 83 of these survivors confirmed that they had disclosed the sexual violence to health care providers, thus allowing for comprehensive post-rape health care. In only 66 cases had survivors received any psychosocial support.

When survivors do access services, care is not always comprehensive or sensitive to survivors' needs. The government has committed to providing free health services for sexual violence survivors, but some women and girls said that service providers required payment for tests or treatment. Others said they did not seek health care because they believed it would cost money they did not have, or because they could not pay for transport to services. Lorraine (all survivors' names have been changed), 30, said she visited Kaga-Bandoro hospital twice about a year after Seleka fighters raped her in April 2015. She told the doctor about the rape: "They didn't do an HIV test. He told me that to do an HIV test I had to pay 1500 CFA (\$2.56)."<sup>30</sup>

Access to post-rape medical care, including emergency contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV, and access to safe abortion remain inconsistent. Thirteen survivors, including three girls, told Human Rights Watch they became pregnant due to sexual violence by armed groups. Béatrice, 18, told Human Rights Watch that an anti-balaka fighter killed her mother and aunt and then raped her repeatedly around November 2015. Interviewed nearly three months later, she was pregnant from the rapes and wanted an abortion but did not know how to access medical care. "What am I going to do with this baby?" Béatrice asked. "I did not want it. Who will take care of it? My family is all dead and I have a murderer's baby."<sup>31</sup>

In some cases, women said that the inability to continue income-generating activities left them dependent on others to meet their basic needs. "When I was at my house, I did small business—made cakes and so forth," said Clarice, 20, of her life before six anti-balaka raped her in Bangui in October 2015. "Since the violence, I'm afraid. Now I don't walk around anymore. It is my aunt who feeds me."<sup>32</sup>

Sexual violence also hindered 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 about the violence.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Lorraine, Kaga-Bandoro, May 3, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Béatrice, Bangui, January 13, 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Clarice, Bangui, May 5, 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. This 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.

#### *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Peacekeepers*

Human Rights Watch documented four cases of sexual exploitation and abuse 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 sexual exploitation and abuse. 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 also documented 16 cases of sexual abuse and exploitation by Ugandan soldiers serving under the African Union's (AU) Regional Task Force to eliminate the LRA.<sup>36</sup> Thirteen women and three girls described exploitation involving the exchange of sex for food or money, as well as one case of rape, that occurred since 2010 in the southeastern town of Obo, where Ugandan troops were based. Fifteen of the women and girls became pregnant from the exploitation and abuse. Rape; sex in exchange for money, goods, or services; and sex with anyone under 18 by AU military, police, or civilians qualify as sexual exploitation and abuse, and are prohibited by the AU under its "zero-tolerance" policy for sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>37</sup>

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

- What steps are being taken to ensure provision of and access to comprehensive post-rape medical and mental health care for all survivors of sexual violence—including HIV prevention, emergency contraception, and abortion—and to enhance capacity of medical and psychosocial service providers to deliver such care, in line with international standards?
- What measures is the government implementing to strengthen the national judicial system response to sexual violence at all levels and combat impunity for sexual violence by armed groups, and to ensure cooperation and collaboration with the Special Criminal Court towards this end?

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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.*

<sup>36</sup> "Central African Republic: Ugandan Troops Harm Women, Girls," Human Rights Watch news release, May 15, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/05/15/central-african-republic-ugandan-troops-harm-women-girls>.

<sup>37</sup> African Union Commission, "Remarks by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the AUC on Women, Peace and Security at High-Level Meeting on the Release of the Report of the UN Secretary-General On "Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach," September 18, 2017, <https://au.int/en/speeches/20170918/remarks-special-envoy-chairperson-auc-women-peace-and-security-high-level-meeting> (accessed February 9, 2018).

- What steps is the government taking or planning to take to help facilitate investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by peacekeepers, and to cooperate with UN and troop-contributing governments in conducting such investigations and implementing measures to increase protection of civilians from both SEA and sexual violence by armed groups?

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

- Ensure availability of free, comprehensive post-rape medical and psychosocial care, including PEP and emergency contraception, 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.
- 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;
- Cooperate with the UN and the AU 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 People with Disabilities in Humanitarian Contexts (Articles 11, 12, 13, 14)**

There is no data on the numbers and needs of people with disabilities in the Central African Republic.<sup>38</sup>

Human Rights Watch conducted research in camps for internally displaced people 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>39</sup>

In further research conducted in April 2017, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 30 people with disabilities in five camps in Bambari, Ouaka prefecture, and Kaga-Bandoro, Nana-Grébizi prefecture. All the camps were receiving limited humanitarian assistance, such as tents, food, and medicine. Access to water and sanitation services, such as latrines and showers, is a daily struggle for people with disabilities in the eastern camps. Without ramps, bars, and other support, some

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<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>; “Central African Republic: People with Disabilities at High Risk, 4 Years into Conflict, More Support, Protection Needed,” June 21, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/21/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-high-risk>.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch, “*Leave No-One Behind.*”

people with physical disabilities were forced to crawl on the ground to enter toilets or shower areas, exposing them to health risks because there are not ramps, bars or other support, or because they are too small for a wheelchair.

Food distribution can be sporadic at displacement camps in Bambari and Kaga-Bandoro and people with disabilities, especially those without families, often struggle to obtain supplies in the chaos during disorganized distributions.<sup>40</sup>

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

- What steps has the government taken to work with humanitarian agencies and international partners to provide for the medical, psychological, and social needs of people with disabilities and ensure they 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 ?
- Does the government, in cooperation with humanitarian agencies, collect data on people with disabilities and their needs?

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

- Identify, register, and include in any data collection efforts information on people with disabilities and their needs.
- Monitor and report publicly about abuses against persons with disabilities.
- Work with humanitarian agencies and international partners to ensure people 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, including by allocating the necessary resources.
- Consult persons with disabilities and include their representative organizations in decision-making. Support local organizations of persons with disabilities.

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<sup>40</sup> “Central African Republic: People with Disabilities at High Risk, 4 Years into Conflict, More Support, Protection Needed,” June 21, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/21/central-african-republic-people-disabilities-high-risk>.