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WATCH

# CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Materials Published by Human Rights Watch  
Between April 2016 and March 2017



# **Central African Republic**

## **Materials Published Between April 2016 and March 2017**



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Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by Rafael Jimenez

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## Central African Republic

### Materials Published Between April 2016 and March 2017

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# Touadéra One Year On: Justice Needs Urgent Kick Start

*Author: Lewis Mudge, Africa researcher, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/30/touadera-one-year-justice-needs-urgent-kick-start>

**March 30, 2017 – Commentary published in *Le Monde***

One year ago, a rare feeling of hope took hold in the [Central African Republic](#) as the new president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, was [sworn](#) in. His administration replaced a transition government that struggled to establish security and stop violence over the previous two years, and his election was a peaceful and legitimate transfer of power, something uncommon in the region.

But a year on the president is trying to quell fighting in the eastern Ouaka province and by some measures the situation is worse than in March 2016. Violence has spread to the northwest, where a [new rebel group](#), called Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation, or 3R, has killed civilians, raped, and caused large-scale displacement. In the central and eastern parts of the country, human rights abuses against civilians are on the [rise](#) as [fighting](#) between various Seleka groups has increased. In October, Seleka fighters killed at least 37 civilians, wounded 57, and forced thousands to flee when they [razed a camp](#) for displaced people in Kaga-Bandoro. Thousands of students throughout Seleka controlled regions [cannot study](#) due to the presence of armed groups near their schools.

Touadéra has said repeatedly over the last year that security and justice for serious human rights abuses are priorities for his government. On both scores however, progress has been too slow.

The president took on one of the hardest jobs in the world. The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels ousted the government in a coup and committed widespread [abuses](#). In mid-2013 anti-balaka militia formed to oppose the Seleka carried out large scale reprisal [attacks](#) against Muslim civilians in Bangui and western parts of the country. The violence killed thousands of people and displaced almost a million, and Seleks factions still control half the country.



As fighting increases, especially in the Ouaka province, the link between violence and justice cannot be overstated. Almost none of those responsible for the widespread human rights abuses have been held accountable. The cycles of impunity have fueled ongoing abuses and emboldened those who seek to take power by force.

The new government took over an overburdened and barely functioning judicial system, already weak before the 2013 outbreak of violence, which needs significant and sustained investment to rebuild. Trials for recent crimes were held under Touadéra's watch, as well as in 2015, but they exposed serious flaws and weaknesses of the system, including in protecting victims and witnesses.

Since September 2014, the office of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has been investigating the situation in the Central African Republic, focusing on alleged crimes in the country since August 2012, the second investigation by the ICC into crimes committed in the country. The government's cooperation with the ICC is critical, but the ICC's investigation, which is ongoing, will most likely only target a handful of suspects.

Another system was needed to address serious crimes and in June 2015, the Central African Republic's then transitional president promulgated a law to establish a [Special Criminal Court](#), consisting of national and international staff, to investigate and prosecute the gravest crimes committed in the country since 2003, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Special Criminal Court has the potential to help address more than a decade of serious crimes and help strengthen the justice system overall. More important, after years of impunity, the court offers a real chance to hold [abusive commanders](#) to account inside the country and send a warning to would-be abusive leaders that they are being watched.

At a donor conference on the Central African Republic in November, I listened as president Touadéra said, "reconciliation cannot be achieved at the cost of impunity." The government has indicated its support for the court, but ultimately will need to do more to put this idea into practice. More than 18 months after the law was passed to create the court, investigations have yet to begin, let alone trials.

On February 15, the president [appointed](#) Toussaint Muntazini Mukimapa of the Democratic Republic of Congo as special prosecutor of the new court, an important step. However,

there are still questions as to the national ownership of the court and the extent to which this tribunal is a priority.

As Touadéra's reflects on his first year he will undoubtedly be concerned with the plight of civilians in the central and eastern parts of the country as they bear the brunt of continued fighting. But getting the Special Criminal Court up and running is the country's best chance to break the impunity that drives this violence. The president should show international supporters, including the United Nations, that accountability is a priority in his second year. With a fully operational court by this time next year, abusive leaders may think twice about targeting civilians.

# Central African Republic: Armed Groups Using Schools

*Preventing Children from Getting an Education*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/23/central-african-republic-armed-groups-using-schools>

**March 23, 2017 – Press release & report**



UPC fighters outside a kindergarten in Ngadja, Ouaka province. The fighters have used the building as a base since October 2014. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

(Nairobi) – Armed groups in the [Central African Republic](#) have occupied, looted, and damaged school buildings, preventing children from getting an education, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 39-page report, [“No Class: When Armed Groups Use Schools in the Central African Republic,”](#) documents how armed groups, and even soldiers from the United Nations peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSCA, have used school buildings as bases or barracks, or based their forces near school grounds. The government and the

peacekeeping mission should increase protection for students and schools in areas of the country affected by armed conflict, Human Rights Watch said.

“Children have lost years of education in many parts of the Central African Republic because armed groups have failed to treat schools as places of learning and sanctuary for children,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch and co-author of the report. “The government and the UN can do more to ensure that fighters stay away from classrooms, and that children can safely go to school.”

The report is released five days before the [Second International Safe Schools Conference](#), hosted by the Argentine government in Buenos Aires. The conference will highlight the global problem of attacks on students, teachers, and schools, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration, an international political commitment endorsed by the Central African Republic and 59 other countries.

Armed groups in the Central African Republic have occupied, looted, and damaged school buildings, preventing children from getting an education.

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 40 people for the report, including school-age children, parents, teachers, and armed group commanders in the provinces of Lobaye, Nana-Mambéré, Nana-Grébizi, Ouham-Pendé, Ouham, and Ouaka.

“It is not normal for a child to lose this much time, it has blocked my future,” said an 18-year-old man in Ouaka province who had lost four years of schooling because fighters for the Seleka, an armed group in the country’s ongoing conflict, have occupied his school. “I wanted to be a doctor, but that is impossible without school.”

The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels opened a military campaign against the government. The Seleka seized the capital, Bangui, in March 2013, in a period marked by widespread [human rights abuse](#). In mid-2013, Christian and animist anti-balaka militia organized to fight the Seleka. The anti-balaka have also [committed widespread abuse](#), especially in [western parts](#) of the country.

Violence by armed groups and attacks on civilians have risen sharply since October 2016, particularly in the center of the country. Fighting between two Seleka factions in



the [Ouaka](#) and [Haute-Kotto](#) provinces has led to increased attacks on civilians and displaced tens of thousands of people.

The Seleka are responsible for eight of the cases documented in the report, but anti-balaka fighters have also occupied and damaged schools. In two cases, UN peacekeepers used a school as a base, in violation of UN regulations, but the forces left both schools after Human Rights Watch informed UN officials.



United Nations peacekeepers from Pakistan using a school building in Mourouba, Ouaka province, as their base in violation of UN guidelines and regulations. The forces left the school in January 2017 after Human Rights Watch informed UN authorities. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

The use of schools by armed forces deteriorates, damages, and destroys the country's already insufficient and poor-quality education infrastructure. Fighters who occupy schools frequently burn furniture and books for cooking fuel. In one case Human Rights Watch documented, an anti-balaka fighter struck a teacher on the head with a knife when the teacher tried to stop him from burning a desk.

Even after fighters have vacated a school, their proximity to school grounds can frighten students and teachers into staying away. “The Seleka are just next to the school and the parents are too scared to send their kids,” a teacher from Nana-Grébizi province said. “The Seleka think it is normal to be based in schools.”

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [estimated in November 2016](#) that 2,336 schools across the country were operational but that at least 461 were not. The key reasons schools are closed, the UN said, are insecurity, a lack of teachers, displacement caused by fighting, the destruction of school property, or the occupation of schools by armed groups.

The Central African Republic signed the Safe Schools Declaration in June 2015, committing itself to protect schools from attack and military use. This important step spurred MINUSCA to begin clearing schools that were occupied by militias. The UN mission made progress in 2016, but was undermined when peacekeeping forces themselves used schools as bases and barracks.

“By endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration, the government demonstrated the value it places on education for the development and stability of the country,” Mudge said. “Armed groups and UN peacekeepers should respect the declaration’s call to protect schools and help children get the education they want and deserve.”



*At left:* A 15-year-old girl from Nana-Grébizi province, who has not attended school since 2013. “I want to be a teacher because they are important for the community and because they are respected,” she told Human Rights Watch. “But now, I don’t know what I can do, I just stay at home all day.”

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# Central African Republic's Lost Generation

*Fighters Occupying, Looting Schools Keep Children From Their Education*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/23/central-african-republics-lost-generation>

**March 23, 2017 – Witness piece**



Seleka MPC fighters at a roadblock in Bojomo, Ouham province, with a desk they removed from the local school. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

*Soldiers camping out in schools and breaking up desks for firewood is common in parts of the Central African Republic. According to a United Nations report from November, 20 percent of the country's schools are not operational, many because of misuse by armed groups. Some students were forced out of school four years ago, when the mainly Muslim Seleka rebels cut a bloody swath through the country and seized the capital. Thousands more children stopped going to school in the ensuing years, as Christian-animist anti-balaka fighters ousted the Seleka, torching whole Muslim communities and displacing more than 860,000 people. Many of these children may never resume their studies, despite hopes kindled when a new government took over a year ago.*



Researcher [Lewis Mudge](#) talks to [Amy Braunschweiger](#) about his latest research and what a lost generation could mean for the future of one of the world's poorest countries.

### **What did you find through your research about the state of the country's schools?**

We found armed groups living at schools and right next to schools. In some cases fighters are just meters away, and for all intents and purposes, occupying it. And in two cases, UN peacekeepers were in schools. We did much of our research in in Central African Republic, where it's mostly the Seleka occupying towns and looting and occupying schools. But anti-balaka fighters and other groups have repeatedly done so as well.

Their very presence was keeping students away from the school. Kids can't study when soldiers are sleeping there. Students and their parents were afraid there could be fighting by the school, or that fighters would assault students on their way to class.

When I asked the fighters why they were in the schools, or why they may occupy them again, they'd say because the schools have good concrete floors, metal roofs, and they're the best buildings in town.

### **So armed groups damaged schools?**

Seleka groups left the schools in bad shape. Both the Seleka and anti-balaka would burn desks and chairs as firewood to cook. Now, there's no place for students to sit. This doesn't sound like a big deal, but it is. These schools can have up to 150 kids in one room, and they need to write on something. The groups burn textbooks. These are rural schools, and a textbook is really valuable. In a crisis, communities store books in the school to safeguard them, and the fighters would destroy them.

At least 31 civilians, possibly many more, were shot at point-blank range or stabbed to death, or their throats were slit during five days of sectarian violence that gripped Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, between September 25 and October 1, 2015.

### **And you found UN peacekeepers in schools?**

We found two schools occupied by UN troops. They had set up their camps and tents under the blackboard. It was surprising, because the UN put out a directive saying don't occupy schools. So our findings demonstrated a disconnect between orders given in the capital and troops in the field. When I asked them why they were in the schools, it was the same



as the Seleka: “It’s a good building.” The good news is that, when we reported it to the UN, they acted immediately. UN command was very shocked and not happy. The forces quickly vacated both schools.

**What kind of stories did you hear from the people you interviewed?**

We talked with a lot of school-age kids. I asked each one what they wanted to be and why school is important. They’re all farming now, and none of them want to be farmers. They want to be teachers or doctors or engineers. That was quite startling. There’s almost this sense of acceptance that they aren’t going back to school, that they can’t make up this time. They’d lost 2 or 3 years, and this is it. Their thoughts were, I’m going to be a farmer now. The one chance I had for myself and my family is gone now.

I met a dad who said school taught him how to read and do math and that allowed him to start a little business. He spoke French – the language business is conducted in there. Along with farming, he has a shop in the village, selling soap, oil, salt, pens, and other goods. And he thinks it’s a shame his kids won’t have that. Because his kids won’t have schooling, he worries they may not have enough money to send his grandkids to school. The ability to read, write and do math makes a huge difference. Schools also give kids a basic level of French. The center of in Central African Republic literally has no state services. There’s a hospital in main towns, but that’s it, and if you can get there good for you, if you can’t then you are on your own. They’re some of the most vulnerable people in the world. The ability to get some education would be a huge step up.

**Were there schools that were open but students couldn’t attend?**

Yes, and those were the students who seemed the most affected. They stopped going to school because of fighters who harassed or threatened students. One woman said she was sending her two kids to school past fighters who had killed her husband, and that traumatized her. Understandably.

We were at a school with fighters right next to it, and they’d fire their guns into the air all the time, just to test them. The students said it was terrifying. The village had been attacked and taken over, and they associated the shooting with the fighting. It’s 9 a.m., they’re trying to study, and a fighter a few yards away is pulling off a few rounds on his Kalashnikov. “When that happens, we all just dive to the floor,” they said. It must be very, very difficult to concentrate on school.

**Did you speak with any teachers?**

There was a teacher in the southwest, at a school previously occupied by anti-balaka. Last year a fighter stabbed this teacher in the head when he tried to stop the fighter from burning a school desk. There were 300 anti-balaka fighters occupying the school then, and I asked why he tried to stop the fighter. The teacher said it was one of the last desks. And he'd had enough. He wanted some vestige of the school left to be able to restart it. I was stuck by his courage. He laughed, acknowledging it wasn't the smartest thing. He showed me his scars. The soldier's commanders apologized to the teacher, which surprised me. They probably realized the fighter – who was never punished – went too far.



A teacher from Sekia-Dalliet, where anti-balaka fighters occupied a school building for two years. “One day an anti-balaka fighter was taking a desk to burn and I had had enough,” he said. “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.” © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

**You had to meet with the Seleka for this report. What was that like?**

We've been talking to them for years. And it's the same-old excuses to justify their presence. First, they deny it. And then you say, yes you are there in the schools, I've seen it. Then, they insist they're there to protect communities from another armed group. What they're doing is working to control roads to profit from trade, whether it's illicit minerals, or normal buying and selling. You see it openly. In one town there's one road, the road where the school is. And the Seleka have the roadblock there. So as they're saying

there're here to protect people, you can literally watch a shakedown, with fighters holding up a guy on a motorcycle at gunpoint and taking his money.

**Did you feel unsafe doing this research?**

Yes. Central African Republic is one of the most dangerous countries for NGO workers. And there's this inherent risk when you're in an armed group's territory and researching what they're doing. Coupled with the fact that they're unprofessional fighters, to say the least. There are a lot of kids in the ranks. That adds a layer and dimension to risk analysis. But on the other hand, we know these groups well. We always operate openly in the sense that we let them know we're there.

The main risks are on the roads. We are very, very aware of where we're going and what group is in control. And we're always in touch with group leaders. We spend a lot of time in the bush, calling leaders, telling them where we are. That way, if we get stopped by some men from a certain group, we can say, "Your guy knows we're here. We can call him now." You have to know the state of the roads – we couldn't do this research in the rainy season. We also plan a lot before the trip, develop protocols and have daily check-ins to stay safe.

**You've worked a lot in Central African Republic. How did researching schools stack up against the rest?**

In terms of human rights abuses, there's a difference between committing a massacre and occupying a school. A massacre is worse. But if there's ever going to be a real peace or stability, it's critical to get schools running. With tens of thousands of kids out of school, it makes you concerned about the future of the country. Even if the education system is poor. By now, we're almost looking at a lost generation in certain parts of the country. I worry about how that might affect the future prospects for peace. Unemployment is everywhere. It's very cheap to get guns. You can see how easy it is for armed groups to recruit people when schools aren't operating.

But if parents can send their kids to school, their children may have some prospects.



An 11-year-old girl who has been out of school for three years because Seleka fighters are based near her school. “I liked being in school, it made me feel good to put on my uniform and go to class,” she said. “I liked literature because it was the subject I was best at. I want to be a teacher, but now I have to work in the fields.” © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch



# A Step Toward Justice in the Central African Republic

## New Court Can Help End Impunity

*Author: Lewis Mudge, Africa researcher, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/21/step-toward-justice-central-african-republic>

### February 21, 2017 – Dispatch

Last month I visited Bakala, a town in the center of the [Central African Republic](#) where serious fighting between two rebel groups had recently claimed [at least 38 lives](#). A few brave residents showed me a well where seven bodies had been dumped. Nearby, we saw what looked like dried blood in a school where a man who managed to escape said 25 other people had been executed.

Ali Darassa, commander of the rebel group that witnesses identified as responsible for these killings, the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (*l'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique*, UPC), fiercely rejected the blame. “These accusations have been made against me and my men in the past and yet look, here I am,” he declared. “I have not been arrested.”

Since the country descended into political and communal [violence](#) in 2013, with thousands of civilians killed, nobody has been prosecuted for serious crimes. All sides have carried out executions and sexual violence.

Since last week, however, Darassa and the others should be less comfortable. On February 15, the president appointed Toussaint Muntazini Mukimapa of the Democratic Republic of Congo as special prosecutor of a new [Special Criminal Court](#). After years of impunity, the court offers a real chance to hold abusive commanders to account inside the country.

The court will consist of national and international staff and has a mandate to investigate and prosecute the gravest crimes committed in the country since 2003. It will partner with the International Criminal Court, which has a mandate to prosecute crimes since August 2012 but will only be able to focus on a handful of high-level suspects.

Progress on the Special Criminal Court has been slow, but international partners have provided initial funding, and the appointment of the chief prosecutor is a crucial step forward. Next should come the prompt appointment of judges and further staffing, along with securing long-term financial support.

The court will help break the cycle of impunity that has left the many armed groups free to kill at will.

A woman who fled Bakala after her husband was executed explained it well. “If my husband’s killers are allowed to keep killing, how can we return?” she said. “They must stop killing. They must know they will face consequences.”

The appointment of the chief prosecutor is a step towards enforcing consequences. That could move the country a step closer to peace.

# Central African Republic: Executions by Rebel Group

*Murder of 32 Civilians, Captured Fighters*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/16/central-african-republic-executions-rebel-group>

**February 16, 2017 – Press release**



Children from Bakala in a displacement camp in Grimali, Central African Republic, January 24, 2017. Approximately 10,000 people have fled fighting between the UPC and the FPRC in Ouaka province since late November 2016. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

(Nairobi) – A rebel group in the [Central African Republic](#) executed at least 32 civilians and captured fighters after clashes in December 2016 with another rebel group in the Ouaka province, Human Rights Watch said today.

In the town of Bakala, rebels from the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (*l'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique*, UPC), on December 12, executed 25 people after calling them to a school for an alleged meeting. Earlier that day, UPC fighters

executed seven men who were returning from a nearby gold mine. Accounts of the incidents were provided by a survivor and eight witnesses, including five men who were forced to help dispose of the bodies. At least 29 other civilians have been killed in fighting around Bakala since late November.

“These executions are brazen war crimes by UPC fighters who feel free to kill at will,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The group is carrying out its killing sprees with no fear of punishment, despite the presence of United Nations peacekeepers.”

The appointment on February 15, 2017 of a chief prosecutor for the Special Criminal Court – a court to be staffed with national and international judges and prosecutors in the capital, Bangui, to prosecute grave human rights violations since 2003 – marks an important step towards accountability, Human Rights Watch said. The court should now be further staffed without delay, so it can begin investigations and prosecutions.

Local residents and officials told Human Rights Watch that tensions between the UPC and the Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique*, FPRC), another rebel group drawn from the predominantly Muslim Seleka fighters, began escalating late last year. Fighting started around Mourouba, 18 kilometers west of Bakala, on November 27, 2016, and the UPC then attacked civilians they suspected of belonging to anti-balaka militia allied with the FPRC.

The FPRC has allied itself with anti-balaka militias, its former enemy, to fight the UPC. The anti-balaka emerged in 2013, largely from existing self-defense groups to resist Seleka abuses, and themselves went on to commit [serious abuses](#) against civilians.

In late January 2017, Human Rights Watch interviewed 28 people in and around Bakala, including victims of other UPC crimes, relatives of victims, and UPC commanders. The total number of victims is most likely higher than the 32 people executed and the 29 civilians killed during clashes because dozens of other people are unaccounted for, family members of the missing people say. Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm all reported killings due to limited access and security concerns.





A 15-year-old boy, who survived a January 2017 attack by the UPC on his village in Mourouba, Central African Republic. Peuhl fighters from the UPC killed his father and two of his brothers that day.

© 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

“A UN helicopter circled the town for some time so we knew things were not normal,” said a 41-year-old man, when describing how UPC fighters gunned down civilians on December 11. “When the helicopter left, the Peuhl [UPC fighters] attacked. The town was encircled. I took my children and ran, but they were shooting at anything that moved.”

Around 5 a.m. on December 12, a group of UPC fighters detained and killed seven men in Bakala as they returned from a nearby gold mine.

“I was hiding in a house and I saw the Peuhl [UPC fighters] gather the men in front of a neighbor’s house and take them inside,” said “Joseph,” a 55-year-old resident of Bakala. “A short time later I heard screams from the men. They were yelling, ‘Why are you killing us?’ and ‘I’m dying!’ I also heard shots. This was all at 5 a.m. A short while later the Peuhl found me and made me help throw the bodies in a well.”

A Human Rights Watch researcher inspected the well and noted a putrid smell that might have come from decaying bodies. Another local resident, interviewed separately, said UPC

fighters also forced him to help throw bodies in the water source.

Later that morning, UPC fighters in Bakala executed another 24 men and at least one boy, whom they accused of supporting the anti-balaka. Bakala residents said that UPC fighters sent a message around town that they would hold a meeting at a local school. Some men were already held at the school from the previous night and when others arrived, the fighters seized the men and gunned them down.

“I jumped up and managed to escape, but everyone else was killed,” said 24-year-old “Laurent,” whose 17-year-old brother was killed. “I ran into the bush and just heard shooting as I ran.”

A local official said he heard the shooting and then UPC fighters forced him to help them throw the bodies into a nearby well, located on the other side of town from the well into which the seven other victims had been thrown. “[The victims were] young anti-balaka and civilians,” he said. “Their bodies were scattered outside the school and the gendarmerie. I counted 25 bodies.”

Under the command of General Ali Darassa Mahamant, the UPC has controlled much of Ouaka province since 2013. The UPC has close links to the minority ethnic Peuhl, and armed Peuhl often fight with the group.

On January 23, 2017, Darassa told Human Rights Watch that his men did not kill any civilians in Bakala or the surrounding villages. “Soldiers in the UPC cannot execute civilians or prisoners,” he said. “What you have heard about the UPC are lies.” Darassa said that he exerts full control over his men.

The fighting in Bakala and the surrounding area displaced between 9,000 and 10,000 people, a town official said. Some of them are staying in other towns, and thousands are living in the forest savannah in Ouaka province.

The UN peacekeeping force in the country, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), has 12,870 armed members and a temporary base in Mourouba. Consistent with its mandate, MINUSCA should take active steps to protect civilians, including when necessary by using force, Human Rights Watch

said.

On February 11, MINUSCA helicopters opened fire on FPRC forces that were moving from Ippy to Bambari, destroying at least four vehicles and killing Seleka General [Joseph Zoundeko](#). The FPRC forces had crossed MINUSCA's declared "red line," established to separate the FPRC and UPC and to protect civilians.

"MINUSCA is facing significant fighting in the center of the country, and it's encouraging to see it enforce its mandate to protect civilians," Mudge said. "Abusive commanders like the UPC's Darassa need to understand that peacekeepers will not tolerate their attacks and they can be held accountable for war crimes committed by their forces."



Bullet casings on the ground in Bakala, Central African Republic, after fighting between the UPC and FPRC in December 2016. Photo taken on January 22, 2017. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

### **Conflict in the Central African Republic**

The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when mostly Muslim Seleka rebels opened a military campaign against the government of Francois Bozizé. The Seleka seized the capital, Bangui, in March 2013. Their rule was marked by widespread [human](#)

[rights abuse](#), including the wanton [killing of civilians](#). In mid-2013, Christian and animist anti-balaka militia organized to fight the Seleka. Associating all Muslims with the Seleka, the anti-balaka carried out large scale [reprisal attacks against Muslim civilians](#) in Bangui and [western parts](#) of the country.

In 2014, African Union and French international forces pushed the Seleka out of Bangui. Ethnic divisions, rivalries, disagreements over resource control, and disputes over strategy quickly tore the Seleka apart. By late 2014, the Seleka had split into several factions, each controlling its own area.

In November 2016, skirmishes erupted between two of the factions, the UPC and FPRC, over control of roads leading to diamond mines around Kalaga, a town 45 kilometers from Bria. Both groups collect “road taxes,” especially in mining areas and on migration routes for Peuhl herders. The skirmishes escalated into more serious fighting.

### **The Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC)**

The UPC is a splinter group of the Popular Front for Redress (*Front populaire pour le redressement*, FPR), a Chadian rebel group mainly consisting of Chadian and Central African Peuhl and commanded by Chadian Babba Laddé. The group’s second in command, Ali Darassa Mahamant, joined the Seleka and officially created the UPC in September 2014. He continues to serve as its president and commander. To keep control of Bambari and the strategic roads that connect it to other parts of the country, including lucrative trade routes toward Sudan, UPC fighters target those they believe are members of or support the anti-balaka.

Fighting between the UPC and other splinter groups began in November 2016, in the central town of Bria, in the Haute-Kotto province. Those [clashes](#) over 11 days left at least 14 civilians dead and 76 wounded.

Fighting continued during the following days on the road to Ippy, a town north of Bambari, and near Ndassima, a gold mine, and then spread south and west to Ouaka province.

FPRC fighters and allies from another Seleka group, the Central African Patriotic Movement (*Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique*, MPC), joined their former enemy, anti-balaka fighters, against the UPC. FPRC and MPC fighters have killed civilians in past attacks, such



as when they [razed a camp for displaced people](#) in Kaga-Bandoro in October, killing at least 37 civilians and wounding 57. In the latest Bakala fighting, however, Human Rights Watch did not document any civilian deaths by the FPRC or MPC, although some might have taken place.

### **Attack on Bakala and Summary Executions**

Bakala has numerous gold mines around the town, making it a strategic post for any group. Since fighting between the two Seleka forces began, control for the town has gone back and forth between the FPRC and the UPC.

On December 11, the UPC temporarily took the town after a major attack. They quickly started to kill civilians, associating them with either FPRC sympathizers or anti-balaka. A 55-year-old resident said:

The attack by the UPC lasted about three hours. I waited in the bush near the town until it was calm. When all was quiet, I went back in. It was the end of the day. I saw bodies of fighters all over, but I also saw the Peuhl kill two civilians. They had set up a base near the market and they would stop men coming from the mines. They took their things and then hung them from a tree until they died. Then they threw the bodies in the [Ouaka] river.

Other residents said that UPC fighters tied up at least two other men, slit their throats, and threw their bodies into the Ouaka River. A Human Rights Watch researcher saw one decayed body of an unidentified person in the river on January 22, 2017.

A day later, UPC fighters killed at least seven men who were returning to the town from the nearby mine. Human Rights Watch spoke with one witness and another man, who along with the witness was forced to help throw seven bodies into a well.

Later that morning, UPC fighters sent a message that they would hold a meeting at the *École Sous-préfecturale*, where it was already holding some men who had been captured the day before. When people gathered there, UPC fighters seized at least 24 men and one boy, gunning them down. Some were walked across the street and killed in front of the gendarmerie station.

A 40-year-old woman, “Claudette,” from Bakala, said she hid with her husband and six children in the Mangoléma neighborhood during the fighting. On December 12, they heard a message that the Seleka were holding a meeting for town residents at the school. She explained:

We did not know if it was the Ghoula [FPRC] or the Peuhl [UPC] who had won the day before. My husband said, “Well, if there is a meeting I will go and see what they have to say.” He went with two neighbors, Edgar and Romain, and my stepson Arnaud [approximately 20-years-old]. A short time later I heard many shots coming from the school. People who had been to the meeting then came running and told me that my husband and Arnaud had been killed.

A 35-year-old woman from Bakala, “Odette,” said she saw UPC forces take men to the school and then heard shooting:

On December 12, some of us women decided that we would try to cross the river and go to Bambari. As we walked we saw some Peuhl who told us not to leave. One said, “Return home, you are all wives of anti-balaka.” But we were scared so we went to the Catholic Church, where many people were hiding. A short time later some Peuhl arrived. They said they were looking for men to take to the school for a meeting. They said they were looking for anti-balaka but I know that some of the men they took were civilians. They took some men and a short time later I heard many shots. Then the Peuhl came back and told a man at the church that he needed to arrange to have the bodies buried.

A local official explained how he heard shooting and then saw many bodies at the school:

It was the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, around 9 a.m. I was down near the river when I started to hear many shots coming from the school. I asked a UPC fighter nearby if he was going to kill me too, but he said, “No, we are only killing the anti-balaka.” They took me to the school and I saw bodies all over the ground. The Peuhl told me that they knew these men and they justified the

killing by saying they were all anti-balaka. But I knew some of them were not. They ordered me to help bury them.

A 24-year-old survivor of the attack, “Laurent,” described how the UPC forces opened fire on their detained men:

After the attack on the 11<sup>th</sup> we were all hiding in the bush. We were called to a meeting at the school by youth from the town. They were saying, “Come to a meeting to see how the people can work with the Seleka.” I decided to go to the meeting. When I arrived there I saw my uncle and my little brother there as well. All the people at the meeting were men. I knew that something was not right.

Personally, I had thought it was a meeting for the FPRC because I still did not know which side had won the fight the day before. I was scared when I saw the Peuhl. Once I arrived they put me in a small group of nine people and told us to go sit down near the gendarmerie, across the road. My brother and my uncle were with me. Once we sat down I heard someone at the school yell, “You are all anti-balaka!” Then they started to shoot at us. I jumped up and managed to escape, but everyone else was killed. My brother was 17-years-old. I ran into the bush and just heard shooting as I ran. I think everyone at the school was killed, but I did not see it.

After the killing, local men were forced to help throw the bodies into a nearby well. One of these men, 46-year-old “Daniel,” said a UPC fighter told him, “We had no choice; we had to kill all the anti-balaka.”

When Human Rights Watch visited Bakala on January 22, the UPC had again lost control. Discarded clothing lay in front of the school where the men were shot and one classroom had what looked like blood stains.

Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) previous UPC attacks around Bakala, in 2014. Between April and June of that year, UPC soldiers killed at least 20 people, including children, in Bakala and Mourouba.



Destroyed FPRC (Seleka) truck in Bakala, Central African Republic, after the violence of December 11, 2016. Photo taken on January 22, 2017. © 2017 Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

### **Attacks Around Bakala**

In January 2017, UPC fighters killed a man and two of his children in Mourouba, 18 kilometers from Bakala. Two other children survived. One, a 15-year-old boy, said they were attacked as they tried to go home:

When Mourouba was attacked, we ran a few kilometers into the woods to hide. But after a few days my dad took me and my three brothers back to the village to look for manioc. In the village, the UPC saw us. One asked, “Were you sent here by our enemies to know our position?” My dad said, “No, we are just looking for food.”

But the Peuhl took us and tied all our hands behind our backs. They took us into the bush and then tied a rope around our necks and attached it to our hands. Then they started to kick us and stab us with bayonets. My father and my brother Viviane [approximately 10 years old] died because they

could not breathe. They stabbed my older brother, Charlie [approximately 16 years old] to death.

After they stabbed us all they assumed we were all dead and they took our shoes and left us. I saw that my dad was dead and that one of my little brothers was not moving. Charlie was still breathing, but he died shortly after. My youngest brother was alive so I took him and we ran away before the Peuhl came back.

Human Rights Watch saw [scars on the boy](#) that appeared to be from stab wounds.

Four residents of Yambélé, a small mining center 110 kilometers southeast of Bambari, said that UPC fighters attacked the town in late December, killing at least 10 civilians. One survivor, a 39-year-old woman, said:

It was in the evening. The Peuhl [UPC] came from the direction of Alindao. When we heard the attack, we tried to run into the bush, but some fighters saw us women and told us to go home, they said they would not hurt us. I watched them gather some men at a house and I then heard shots. Then I ran into the bush. As I was running I saw Peuhl burning houses. I also saw the bodies of people I knew. I stopped by the body of Felix Gandaya, my neighbor [25 years old], but he was already dead. He had been shot and stabbed in the neck.

On December 8, UPC fighters attacked the village Piangou, 40 kilometers east of Bakala, on the road to Ippy. A resident said that FPRC fighters had been based in Piangou for several days before the attack and from there opened attacks on Ndassima, 45 kilometers away. On December 8, the FPRC fighters retreated to Bakala, and UPC fighters entered the village a short time later. “The UPC arrived at around 10 a.m.,” explained one resident, a 45-year-old man. “They did a patrol in the village and killed four people. When I heard the shots, I ran.”

### **Displacement and Humanitarian Needs**

Fighting in the Ouaka province has forced about 10,000 residents of Bakala and Mourouba to flee. Some are living in homes in Mbrés, while others have sought shelter in

displacement camps in Bambari. Approximately 2,500 people found shelter in a new displacement camp in Grimali. At least several thousand others are camping out in the savannah woods around Bakala. Due to ongoing security concerns, nongovernmental groups have not been able to deliver adequate levels of aid.

The displacement has divided families. On January 24, Human Rights Watch met a man in Grimali who was searching for his six children. They had lost each other in the December 11 Bakala attack. Human Rights Watch also found four children, ages 5 to 11, who were separated from their parents after the attack on Piangou on December 8.

### **Accountability and International Law**

The crimes in Ouaka province fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose prosecutor opened investigations into crimes in the country in September 2014, as well as the [Special Criminal Court](#) (SCC), a new judicial body with national and international judges and prosecutors that, when operational, will have a mandate to investigate and prosecute grave human rights violations in the country since 2003.

The government's cooperation with the ICC is critical, but the ICC's investigation, which is ongoing, will most likely only target only a handful of suspects. The SCC offers a meaningful opportunity to hold accountable commanders from all parties to the conflict who are responsible for war crimes, such as those committed by the UPC, and needs [sustained international support](#), Human Rights Watch said. On February 15, 2017, president Faustin-Archange Touadéra signed a decree naming Col. Toussaint Muntazini Mukimapa, attorney general of the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as the prosecutor for the SCC.

Extrajudicial killings and targeted killings of civilians violate international humanitarian law and may be prosecuted as war crimes. International humanitarian law also strictly prohibits parties to non-international armed conflicts from any countermeasures against civilians or fighters who have ceased to take a direct part in hostilities.



# Central African Republic: Mayhem by New Group

*Murders, Rapes by 3R Armed Group in Northwest*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/20/central-african-republic-mayhem-new-group>

**December 20, 2016 – Press release**



Fighters from the rebel group “Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation” (3R) in De Gaulle, in the Kouï sub-prefecture of the Ouham Pendé province, Central African Republic, on November 25, 2016.

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(Nairobi) – A recently formed armed group called “Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation,” or 3R, has killed civilians, raped, and caused largescale displacement over the past year in northwest [Central African Republic](#), Human Rights Watch said today. United Nations peacekeepers in the area have been unable to fully protect civilians.

“The Central African Republic is on the international agenda, but its neglected northwest territory now presents an emerging crisis,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human



Rights Watch. “The 3R armed group, which originally portrayed itself as a protector of the Peuhl, has used its increased strength to expand abusive attacks.”

Between November 21 and 27, 2016, Human Rights Watch documented the killing of at least 50 civilians in the Bocaranga and Kouï sub-prefectures in Ouham Pendé province. Human Rights Watch interviewed 42 people, including 8 victims of 3R abuse, 9 relatives of victims, and 16 witnesses. They described how 3R members shot and killed civilians, raped women and girls, and pillaged and burned villages. The force’s actions have displaced at least 17,000 people: 14,000 around the town of Bocaranga and 3,000 on the border with Cameroon.

The number of 3R’s victims is probably higher but Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm all reported killings and rapes due to limited access and security concerns. Human Rights Watch saw one village, Bogon III, that 3R had destroyed, and heard credible accounts of others, including seeing photographs of the destruction.

Under the command of self-proclaimed General Sidiki Abass, 3R emerged in late 2015 to protect the minority Peuhl population in the region from attacks by anti-balaka militia, one of the two major combatant groups in the country in recent years. In April and May 2016, 3R increased its attacks on villages in the Kouï sub-prefecture, allegedly in retaliation for anti-balaka activity. On September 27, 3R attacked the town of De Gaulle, the sub-prefecture capital, with about 20,000 people, and other villages in the area. 3R deny they have committed any abuses.

Anti-balaka, under the command of a self-proclaimed general, Abbas Rafal, have also killed Peuhl civilians and fighters in and around Bocaranga, where Human Rights Watch saw dozens of armed anti-balaka fighters moving freely in late November. Human Rights Watch also saw at least 100 armed 3R fighters in De Gaulle.

On November 22, Sidiki told Human Rights Watch by telephone that all his men respect human rights and denied allegations of abuse. On November 25, Human Rights Watch met with a spokesman for 3R, who goes only by the name Bashir and refused to give his family name, and the group’s general secretary, Patrick Gombado. Both men admitted that 3R had attacked De Gaulle – because of the anti-balaka presence in the town, they said. Bashir told Human Rights Watch that some 3R fighters had stolen private property for

personal use during the attack because: “It is combat,” he said. “But we do not pillage as a group.” Bashir claimed the group does “try to address this type of indiscipline” but did not specify how. Both men denied that 3R fighters had committed any unlawful killings or rapes.

On November 26, Rafal told Human Rights Watch that his group executed Peuhl suspected of being spies “even if they are unarmed.” Human Rights Watch confirmed two such killings in November. Anti-balaka fighters also raped at least six women and girls in 2016, according to people providing services to survivors and monitoring sexual violence in the area.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that Sidiki arrived in the area in 2015 and held meetings in several villages around Kouï, saying 3R’s goal was to ensure that Peuhl could live in peace with other inhabitants of the area. But fighters associated with 3R soon began attacking these villages, they said, ostensibly provoked by anti-balaka attacks on Peuhl and cattle theft by both anti-balaka and local residents.

The attacks increased in 2016. On September 27, 3R carried out its largest attack, on De Gaulle. Human Rights Watch documented 17 civilians who were killed during or just after the attack, and the total number is probably higher as many people remain missing.

People monitoring sexual violence in the area, who did not want to be identified due to security concerns, said they received reports of rapes of 23 women and girls by 3R fighters during and after the De Gaulle attack. Human Rights Watch interviewed two women and one girl who gave accounts of Sidiki’s men raping them. Two of the survivors said that their children witnessed the rapes. “Blandine,” a 30-year-old woman from De Gaulle, told Human Rights Watch that 3R fighters broke into her home:

One said, “Where is your husband?” I said that he was not there...One of them cocked his gun and pointed it at me and said, “We are going to have sex with you.” He threw me on the ground and [one of them] raped me. Another was waiting for his turn, but there was shooting outside while the first one was finishing, so when he was done they both left.... [M]y two younger children were right beside me, crying.

As of December 13, groups that provide services to rape victims had limited access to the area because of security concerns.

The UN peacekeeping force in the country, the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), has 12,870 forces in the country, including about 100 combat ready soldiers in Bocaranga and 100 in De Gaulle.

UN officers in Bocaranga told Human Rights Watch on November 26 that they are trying to conduct as many patrols as possible with the combat-ready men they have, but admit that both the 3R and anti-balaka are emboldened to circulate freely with their guns. They said that all information is sent to Bangui, the capital, but no troop increase to the region was expected.

Consistent with the mission's mandate, MINUSCA should take steps to protect civilians, including older people, women, and girls, and including by use of force. MINUSCA should also take steps to ensure access to life-saving services, including comprehensive post-rape medical and mental health care.

The crimes committed in the area fall under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose prosecutor opened investigations into crimes in the country in September 2014, as well as the [Special Criminal Court](#) (SCC), a new judicial body with national and international judges and prosecutors that has a mandate to investigate and prosecute grave human rights violations in the country since 2003. The SCC offers a meaningful opportunity to hold accountable commanders from all parties to the conflict responsible for war crimes, and needs sustained international support, Human Rights Watch said.

Extrajudicial killings, targeted killings of civilians, rape, and other forms of sexual violence all violate international humanitarian law and may be prosecuted as war crimes. International humanitarian law also strictly prohibits parties to non-international armed conflicts from resorting to acts of revenge or any countermeasures against civilians or fighters who have ceased to take a direct part in hostilities.

The 3R attacks come at a time of increasing unrest and violence in the center of the country, particularly in [Kaga-Bandoro](#), [Bria](#), and Bambari.

“The national government and MINUSCA face immense problems, but they need to help stop the violence in the northwest and reassert some degree of the rule of law,” Mudge said. “Sidiki and Rafal should be warned that they are being watched and will be judged for their actions.”

### **Central African Republic in Crisis**

The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when mostly Muslim Seleka rebels began a military campaign against the government of Francois Bozizé. The Seleka took control of Bangui in March 2013. Their rule was marked by widespread [human rights abuses](#), including the wanton [killing of civilians](#). In mid-2013, Christian and animist anti-balaka militia organized to fight the Seleka. Associating all Muslims with the Seleka, the anti-balaka carried out large scale [reprisal attacks against Muslim civilians](#) in Bangui and [western parts](#) of the country.

Since 2013, Human Rights Watch has documented numerous cases in which [anti-balaka militias](#), [civilians and Seleka groups](#) have targeted the Peuhl.

### **3R (Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation)**

The 3R spokesman, Bashir, and its general secretary, Gombado, assert that 3R is not a rebel group but a resistance movement to defend Peuhl from violence that is expanding into the Nana-Mambéré, Ouham Pendé, and Mambéré-Kadéï provinces. They said 3R wants national authorities to return to De Gaulle, which they left after the September 27 attack, but that 3R will keep its guns until anti-balaka are disarmed and Peuhl are protected.

Local leaders said that relations with Sidiki and 3R were amicable at first but then anti-balaka increased their activity in the area and 3R started attacking villages. One local official who did not wish to be named explained:

Sidiki said he was there to protect herders who had been attacked and, in order to do so, he had to form a group. He said he was not a rebel but was

there to protect Peuhl and he wanted the authorities to be aware of his presence. He also said he was ready to go into DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, a joint disarmament program of the national government and MINUSCA] if the anti-balaka were not a threat. But then he changed his position and started to attack villages. He attacked Boumari in 2015 and then the attacks just increased. Now he has destroyed the sub-prefecture.

Another local official said that the violence worsened in April, when the anti-balaka started to attack Sidiki's men. "Sidiki sent his men to burn villages and to kill under the pretext that the people were hiding anti-balaka and stealing cows," he said.

Bashir and Gombado said they sell cattle to procure weapons from the black market but they denied allegations of murder and rape. "Not one civilian has been killed by our men," Bashir told Human Rights Watch. "Not one woman has been raped. There has been no violence committed by our men in De Gaulle or in Kouï."

### **Attacks on Kouï Villages**

According to local authorities, residents, and others monitoring conditions in the area, 3R has attacked at least 13 villages in Kouï sub-prefecture since November 2015. Anti-balaka were present in some of these villages but, local residents said, they quickly fled, leaving civilians to bear the brunt of the attacks. Human Rights Watch spoke with residents of nine villages who described these attacks.

In November 2015, days after Sidiki had assured the villagers that his men would not target civilians, 3R fighters attacked Boumari, about 40 kilometers from De Gaulle, and killed the village chief, 75-year-old Abel Ndombe. "The chief did not run when he saw the fighters because he thought it was safe to talk to them," a witness said. "He approached them and they shot him in the throat."

On January 23, 3R fighters attacked Sangodoro, a village 22 kilometers south of De Gaulle. A witness said:

It was around 5:30 a.m. and I heard shooting in the village. I ran like everyone else into the woods. From the woods we watched the attackers

burn the village. It was Sidiki's men; we could tell by their uniforms. I saw the bodies of two people [both civilians] from the village, Desa Amado and Anicet.

Another resident said:

I ran outside and found my neighbor, Anicet, and we ran for the woods. He was shot in the head as we ran – he fell right away. I ran and hid where I found others from the village. After a few hours, a man named Mado decided he was going to go back to the village to look for some money that he had buried in the ground near his house. We soon heard a shot. A little while later we heard his daughter screaming. He had been shot by the 3R but was still alive and we found him in the woods. But it was not good. He was shot in the chest and he knew he was going to die. He was saying, “I am going to die, who is going to care of my kids?” He died a short while later.

In mid-September, 3R fighters attacked the village of Bouzou, 50 kilometers from De Gaulle, killing two people. The attack forced residents to flee to De Gaulle, which was attacked a few days later.

A 40-year-old woman from Bouzou said: “When the attack started I ran into the bush. By the afternoon I returned to the village and saw that everything had been burned, even the church. I then decided to walk to De Gaulle. I had to manage the journey with six children so it took two days.”

Ousmanou Alain Doui, 63, died after his family fled to De Gaulle. His son said: “The voyage was just too much for him.”

### **Attack on De Gaulle**

Residents of De Gaulle told Human Rights Watch that they noticed an increase in attacks by 3R on the outskirts of the town in the days leading up to the main attack on September 27. “Emmanuel,” 56, who like others asked not to be identified by name for fear of reprisal, said:



On September 26 I was at the place outside of town where I keep my cows and sheep. A group of Sidiki's men arrived – I recognized two of them. They surrounded me and saw a bow and some arrows that I use to protect the animals. One of the fighters said that proved I was an anti-balaka. He said, "We are going to kill you and take your animals." I said, "Take the animals but let me live." But he said, "No, we are going to kill you anyway." I said, "Do what you want, God will decide my fate." They tied me up with my feet tied to my hands behind my back and started to kick me in the sides. One took a knife and started to cut my throat. When I started to bleed I thought that I was dead. But when they left I was still alive. My son soon arrived and found me. It hurt to speak and I had to turn my head and put a hand over my throat to keep the blood from spilling out, but I was alive.

"Emmanuel" said he hid for four days with his son before being transported to Bocaranga, where he received medical treatment. Human Rights Watch saw what appeared to be knife scars on his neck.

As 3R took the town, its fighters began targeting civilians. "When I heard the shooting I went outside and started to run," a 50-year-old man said. "I saw one of Sidiki's fighters and he shot me in the knee. He kept shooting at me, but I ran to the bush where I hid for four days. I was unarmed – he just shot at me like I was an animal." Human Rights Watch saw what looked like a bullet wound scar on the man's knee.

One resident described the killing of his father, Alain-Josue Yapele, who was between 65 and 75 years old:

He said to leave him in the house as they wouldn't kill an old man. We hid behind the house and from there we saw Sidiki's men enter. We heard shots. The attackers left the house shortly after and we ran to see my father. He told us, "They broke down the door and just started to kick me and beat me with their guns before they shot me." He said he knew one of the attackers, a Mbororo (Peuhl) from De Gaulle. [He] was one of Sidiki's men. My father was shot in the arm and in the face.

The son said that they were unable to get him help because of the dangerous conditions, and that his father lost blood and died. They buried him and fled and have not returned to De Gaulle.

After the attack, 3R fighters chased residents into the surrounding woods, targeting civilians. A 35-year-old woman, “Blandine,” who was eight months pregnant at the time, said:

When De Gaulle was attacked I ran with my husband and nine kids into the bush. We hid there with about 30 other people from the town. The next morning, we were having breakfast but Sidiki’s men found our hiding place. They came quietly and surprised us. There were at least 10 of them and they started to shoot at us straight away. I saw four people killed: Noui Njacko, Andre, Elizar, and Korin Nzako. Korin was pregnant. She was shot in the stomach while trying to run away.

Korin Nzako, a 16-year-old mother of one, was four months pregnant at the time of her death.

### **Rape by 3R**

People monitoring sexual violence in the area, who did not want to be identified due to security concerns, told Human Rights Watch they had recorded 43 cases in which women and girls said they had been raped by 3R fighters, 23 of them during or just after the attack on De Gaulle. While some of these cases may be recorded by more than one person or agency, the total number of cases is likely to be much higher due to underreporting of sexual violence. Human Rights Watch interviewed three survivors.

A 33-year-old woman, “Agnes,” said she ran with her husband and their 7-year-old son into the woods when the 3R attacked. As they fled, her husband was shot in the leg and she and her son became separated from him:

[My son and I were] walking when we came upon a group of 10 fighters from Sidiki’s group. Two of them raped me... One of them pointed his gun and said, “If you don’t have sex with me, I’ll kill you.”...They raped me one by

one. My son was right there throughout it all. They forced me to just put him to the side. He was crying.

A 14-year-old girl, “Delphine” said that she and her father fled their village after a 3R attack. They were approaching De Gaulle at dawn when a 3R fighter armed with a rifle came up behind them:

He grabbed me and when my father attempted to react [he] grabbed my father’s throat. I screamed because I thought he was going to kill my father. He let my father go and instead grabbed me by the throat. He threw me on the ground and hit me on the side with his rifle. He pointed his gun at me and said, “If you don’t sleep with me I’ll kill you.” He then pointed the gun at my father and said, “If I don’t sleep with your daughter I will kill you.” My father had to stay under a tree some distance away. Then he forced himself on me... When he finished the act he left without saying a word... Sometimes I dream that I am being raped by this man and that he is going to kill me after he is done.

While some survivors of sexual violence have been able to access psychological and medical care, service providers told Human Rights Watch that only a small number of woman and girls were able to access services due to lack of security. A service provider told Human Rights Watch that most survivors of sexual violence have not received essential post-rape care, including post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV transmission. Organizations that provide assistance to rape survivors were forced to evacuate



“Blandine,” age 30, described how 3R rebel fighters raped her in front of her two children after they attacked the town of De Gaulle, Central African Republic, on September 27.

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Bocaranga on September 27 due to lack of security and did not restart services until October 11. Anti-balaka forces have not allowed these organizations to access the Kouï sub-prefecture since September 27, 2016.



"Claude," 21, said 3R rebel group fighters tortured him in De Gaulle, in the Kouï sub-prefecture of the Ouham Pendé province, Central African Republic, after the group seized the town in late September.

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### **Torture by 3R**

Human Rights Watch confirmed three cases, and heard reliable testimony of several others, in which 3R fighters tortured men in the Kouï sub-prefecture.

After 3R attacked De Gaulle, they took "Claude," 21, to Sidiki's base:

They kept asking for the gun and I said I did not have one. One man said, "Okay, because you will not show us the gun, we will torture you until you give it to us." They tied me up with my feet tied to my hands behind my back for two days. During those two days they beat me severely with a metal cord. At one point they tied me up by my neck, again, with my feet

tied to my hands behind my back, and then suspended me in the air for a few hours. After two days the MINUSCA soldiers came and saved me. The 3R fighters said I could leave with MINUSCA because they had done their own investigation and they found no gun... The pain I felt is difficult to describe. Even now, almost two months later, I vomit and it still hurts to eat.

Human Rights Watch saw the man's scars, which [showed clear traces of beating](#).

"Jean" said he arrived in the village of Ngaokala after fleeing the De Gaulle attack and saw a boy of 14 or 15 years with his feet bound to his hands behind his back. He had been accused of stealing cattle and beaten by 3R fighters for hours while in that position. The local community raised 170,000 francs (approximately US \$275) to free him, "Jean" said.

A resident of De Gaulle, "Pascal," said he witnessed 3R fighters and Sidiki himself torture and kill a man from the town, 34-year-old Nambona Dounia, whom they found near Makonzi Wali, a crossroads 20 kilometers from De Gaulle. "He was taken in front of the sub-prefecture administrative building and beaten by about 20 men," he said. "After a while they slit his throat. I saw Sidiki there, he participated."

### **Killings by Anti-Balaka in Bocaranga**

Anti-balaka fighters under the command of self-proclaimed General Rafal murdered at least two unarmed Peuhl in November. Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm the identity of one of the victims, but Rafal himself said that he had killed the unarmed Peuhl man he suspected was a spy on the outskirts of town on November 24.

In early November, Rafal and his men killed Amadou Tourra, a 27-year-old Peuhl, witnesses said. Tourra had fled areas under Sidiki's control in March because, people who spoke with him said, 3R was trying to forcibly recruit him. Acquaintances of Tourra said that 3R fighters had injured Tourra in the arm with a knife after he refused to join.

The witnesses said that at about 4 a.m. on November 11, Rafal and approximately six anti-balaka fighters broke into the compound where Tourra was hiding. They forced him to his knees and, despite his pleas for mercy, shot him in the head and the arms. Human Rights Watch saw photos of Tourra's body taken in the hours after his death, showing what appeared to be bullet wounds in his arms and head.

## **Displacement and Humanitarian Needs**

Fighting in the Ouham Pendé province has displaced at least 17,000 people during 2016. The majority are living in makeshift grass huts next to villages along principal roads. Some are staying in the homes of friends or family. Due to ongoing security concerns, aid groups have not been able to deliver all the needed assistance.

A 40-year-old man from Boumari, who now lives with his family of six on the outskirts of Bodé, 20 kilometers north of Bohong, said:

Many of us can't access our fields and those who dare to go back have to walk all day, work in the fields and then return the following day. We have lost all of our belongings in the attack. The NGOs that provide support do not come often because the roads are dangerous. Our village is now scattered throughout the bush. How long can we live like this?

A 41-year-old mother of four from De Gaulle staying with relatives in Douya, south of Bocaranga, said, "The kids are now out of school and just here, doing nothing. We can't go back to De Gaulle and restart our lives because Sidiki's men are still there. Until it is safe, we will just stay here and depend on the charity of our family. Life has been suspended."



# ICC: First Lord's Resistance Army Trial Begins

*Thousands of Victims Participating in Case*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/05/icc-first-lords-resistance-army-trial-begins>

## December 5, 2016 – Press release

(Brussels) – The opening of the [International Criminal Court](#) trial of a Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commander is an important new chapter in holding the rebel group accountable for its brutal crimes in northern Uganda, Human Rights Watch said today. The trial of Dominic Ongwen, who was abducted as a child and later became a senior LRA commander, will begin on December 6, 2016, in The Hague. The charges will be read, followed by opening statements from the prosecution and lawyers who represent several thousand victims involved in the case. The trial will then adjourn until January 16, 2017, when the prosecution will begin to present its evidence.

“The ICC trial of Dominic Ongwen is a significant first on justice for LRA atrocities,” said [Elise Keppler](#), associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch. “The LRA leadership is reviled worldwide for its brutality against Africans, but never before has an LRA commander faced trial.”

Led by the Ugandan warlord [Joseph Kony](#), the LRA has committed atrocities against civilians for nearly three decades. The armed group has abducted tens of thousands of children for use as soldiers and sexual slaves, and killed and maimed thousands of civilians in remote regions of northern Uganda, northeastern [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), [South Sudan](#), and the [Central African Republic](#).

Ongwen is charged with 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda, where the group originated. Charges center on alleged crimes in 2003 and 2004 during attacks on people in four camps for internally displaced persons – Pajule, Odek, Abok, and Lukodi – including murder, torture, enslavement, persecution, and pillage. Charges also include sexual and gender-based crimes and the conscription and use of child soldiers in northern Uganda from 2002 to 2005.

The ICC can only step in when national courts are unable or unwilling to prosecute. The ICC opened an investigation into crimes in northern Uganda in July 2004, following a request from the Ugandan government. The court issued warrants in July 2005 for Ongwen and four other LRA commanders, including Kony, who remains at large. The three other suspects are believed to have been killed in recent years.

[Charges are pending](#) against another LRA fighter, Thomas Kwoyelo, before Uganda's International Crimes Division of the High Court. That trial is [expected](#) to open in the coming months.

"The ICC's trial of Ongwen highlights its role as a crucial court of last resort," Keppler said. "Victims' advocates across Africa have [urged their governments](#) to support the ICC following recently announced withdrawals by three African countries."

The ICC has faced backlash from some African leaders since 2009, on the claim that the ICC is targeting Africa. The ICC's investigations have focused almost exclusively on crimes committed in Africa, but the majority of the investigations came about due to an explicit request or grant of jurisdiction from the government in the country where the crimes were committed – as in the case of Uganda.

[South Africa](#), Gambia, and [Burundi](#) announced their withdrawal from the court in October and November. The withdrawals – the only ones the court has faced – have no legal bearing on proceedings against Ongwen, Human Rights Watch said.

In the face of the withdrawals, a number of African governments – including Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania – [affirmed their commitment](#) to support the ICC at the ICC's annual meeting of its members in November. The ICC Assembly of States Parties president, Sidiki Kaba, the Senegalese justice minister, has urged Burundi, Gambia, and South Africa to reconsider their decisions to withdraw from the court, which take one year to go into effect.

With the ICC based thousands of miles from northern Uganda, court efforts to make the trial accessible and meaningful to the local population are especially important, Human Rights Watch said. For the opening, the ICC will have "viewing sites" in the four locations in northern Uganda where the alleged crimes occurred, as well as in Gulu, the largest town

in the region, and Coorom, the area near where Ongwen is from. The ICC will also bring local community leaders from Uganda to The Hague to observe the opening, with support from the Danish government.

More than 4,100 people are “victim participants” in the Ongwen trial, represented by two sets of lawyers. Victim participation at the ICC is an innovative feature of international justice that allows victims, through their legal representatives, to contribute to the proceedings, separately from testifying as witnesses. Participation may include questioning witnesses and making submissions on legal and factual subjects. During the trial, Ongwen will be entitled to protections to ensure the fairness of the proceedings and his rights as an accused. These include [the right to a lawyer and the presumption of innocence](#).

According to available information, LRA fighters abducted Ongwen from northern Uganda into their ranks when he was about 10 and forced him into military training. He rose to become a senior commander. On January 6, 2015, US military advisers working with the African Union Regional Task Force in the Central African Republic, where some LRA groups remain operational, [received Ongwen into custody](#). He was eventually transferred to the ICC.

Ongwen is believed to be the only former child abductee to face charges before the ICC. His status as a former child soldier could be relevant to his legal defense and mitigation in sentencing in the event of conviction, though the crimes he is charged with were committed as an adult.

Human Rights Watch has documented serious abuses by the Ugandan armed forces over the course of its 25-year armed conflict with the LRA, [including torture](#), rape, arbitrary detention, unlawful killings, and forced displacement of its citizens into camps with [no protection](#) and [minimal humanitarian assistance](#). The ICC has never ruled out investigation of abuses by Ugandan military forces, but has also never taken such investigation forward. Impunity for abuses by Ugandan forces has been a persistent concern by people in northern Uganda. Regular updates and explanation about the ICC’s approach to those abuses are needed, Human Rights Watch said.

Given the extent of serious abuses allegedly committed by the LRA outside Uganda – including in the Central African Republic, [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), and South Sudan – the ICC prosecutor should consider expanding the investigation into LRA crimes to other areas under the court’s jurisdiction, Human Rights Watch [said](#).

The ICC’s mandate only covers serious crimes committed from 2002 onward.

“Ongwen’s trial covers significant crimes, but does not extend to horrific LRA abuses committed outside Uganda,” Keppler said. “This is a real loss for the LRA victims in Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.”

# Central African Republic: Civilians Killed During Clashes

*Minority Peuhl at Risk, Better UN Protection Needed*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/05/central-african-republic-civilians-killed-during-clashes>

**December 5, 2016 – Press release**



People displaced from the fighting in Bria wait for water at a makeshift camp in town on November 28, 2016.

© 2016 Lewis Mudge / Human Rights Watch

(Nairobi) – Serious fighting in the Central African Republic in late November 2016 between two Seleka groups left at least 14 civilians dead and 76 wounded, Human Rights Watch said today. Armed groups appear to have deliberately targeted five of the civilians killed during the main clashes in the central town of Bria between November 21 and 23, and nine others in the ensuing days. Three other civilians are missing and presumed dead.

The civilian deaths, which occurred during the most serious violence between Seleka groups since the Seleka fractured in 2014, highlight the need for United Nations peacekeepers deployed in the Central African Republic to exercise their mandate and use force to protect civilians.

“The rising violence in the central regions between Seleka factions is having a predictably grave impact on civilians,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “UN peacekeepers should anticipate these incidents and use force to protect these vulnerable people, as their mandate allows.”

About 485 Peuhl civilians taking shelter in three residential compounds in Bria, many of them women and children, are terrified of revenge attacks because Peuhl comprise the majority of one of the fighting factions. These civilians need the immediate protection of the nearly 250 peacekeepers already in town, Human Rights Watch said.

Between November 28 and 30, Human Rights Watch interviewed 10 civilian victims of the violence, 5 witnesses, 10 local authorities and leaders of the Seleka factions that fought – the Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique, FPRC), and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (l'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique, UPC). The fighting left at least 115 combatants on both sides dead.

Tension between the two factions around Bria had been high before the latest violence. In early November, skirmishes erupted between the two groups over control of roads leading to diamond mines around Kalaga, a town 45 kilometers from Bria. Both factions collect “road taxes,” especially in mining areas and on migration routes for Peuhl herders. The FPRC attacked the UPC in Gobolo on November 21, sparking major hostilities.

The UN has 12,870 peacekeepers deployed across the country, including 246 armed forces who were in Bria at the time of the fighting, but they were unable to protect civilians in the heavy fighting. The UN sent additional peacekeepers to the town after the clashes. National security forces, such as police and gendarmes, were not capable of stopping the fighting and sought protection from the UN.





A new camp for people displaced by the fighting in Bria, Central African Republic.

© 2016 Lewis Mudge / Human Rights Watch

The UPC largely consists of ethnic Peuhl, and the fighting led to violence against Peuhl civilians by both FPRC fighters and men in civilian clothes. On November 21, two FPRC fighters killed a local businessman, Nouhou Badem, at his home in Mandé II neighborhood, where hundreds of Peuhl were seeking refuge.

Fighting flared around the town's hospital. By 8 a.m. on November 21, FPRC fighters who had brought injured fighters to the hospital had based themselves within the compound, firing on UPC fighters who had assumed positions outside the hospital. Around this time, FPRC fighters and men in civilian clothes pulled two injured Peuhl out of the hospital, one of them perhaps a fighter, and killed them outside the main entrance.

The fighting displaced up to 10,000 people from Bria, a town of approximately 43,000. At least 7,000 are in a makeshift camp around the UN peacekeeping base in town, with 2,000 to 3,000 others in homes and schools near the airstrip. At the makeshift camp, Human Rights Watch observed squalid conditions that require an urgent humanitarian response. The camp started to receive limited assistance on December 1.



The violence also spread to Bria's periphery. Peuhl fighters aligned with the UPC have targeted non-Peuhl civilians and, in revenge, armed non-Peuhl have attacked Peuhl civilians. On November 26, men with guns, machetes and knives attacked nine Peuhl, including three women and four children, outside of Golaga, 10 kilometers outside of Bria, killing five of them. Three of the others are missing and presumed dead.

The faction leaders told Human Rights Watch that their fighters do not target civilians. However, both sides have used inflammatory language that could be perceived as support for violence against civilians.

The head of the FPRC military wing in Bria, General Azor Khalid, said he wanted the Peuhl out of Bria and his fighters planned to push the UPC out of its base in Bambari, 170 kilometers west, with help from the local population, including anti-balaka militia. The head of political affairs for the UPC in Bria, Moussa Ahmat Alou, said his men would do whatever they could to "prevent a genocide." Between November 28 and 30, Human Rights Watch saw hundreds of heavily armed fighters from both factions, many in civilian clothes, moving freely around areas of the town under their respective control.

"Tension is high and civilians are paying the price," Mudge said. "The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime. FPRC and UPC commanders should know they could be held responsible for the action of their men."

### **Central African Republic in Crisis**

Fighting has raged in the Central African Republic since December 2012, when the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels, claiming to represent the country's aggrieved Muslim minority in the northeast, moved southwest into more populous non-Muslim areas, [killing thousands of civilians](#). In 2014, international forces pushed the Seleka out of the capital, Bangui. Ethnic divisions, rivalries, disagreements over resource control, and disputes over strategy quickly tore the Seleka apart. By late 2014, the Seleka split into several factions, each controlling its own area.

### **Violence in Bria**

On November 21, hundreds of Peuhl civilians sought shelter at the compound of Nouhou Badem, a local businessman. Two FPRC fighters arrived at Badem's house that morning

and shot into the compound, killing Badem and wounding four others, three witnesses said. One of those who saw the shooting said:

The fighters came from the direction of the airport. They arrived outside the compound and greeted Nouhou in Arabic. They said, ‘Don’t worry, we will not hurt you.’ But then they backed up and just started to shoot at all of us. Five people were hit by bullets, including Nouhou, who died on the spot. He was shot in the chest.

Peuhl residents of Gobolo were also targeted during the fighting, including a 66-year-old woman who said she was shot through the back and injured after her son, 40-year-old Hamadou Abash, was shot and killed. “We were outside the house, the fighters were just coming toward the town. I heard a shot and Hamadou fell,” she said. “I fell on top of him to protect him and then I was shot through the back.” Human Rights Watch saw what looked like an entrance and exit wound from a bullet in the woman’s back and chest for which she is receiving medical treatment.

As the fighting increased around the hospital, FPRC fighters and men in civilian clothes forcibly removed two injured Peuhl who were getting treatment at the hospital, one of whom may have been a combatant, and killed them outside the main entrance. An injured Peuhl who was seeking treatment at the hospital at the time and witnessed the killing said:

We were on the hospital grounds, but not yet in the buildings. Men came to take us. They were already in the hospital and they were dressed in military fatigues and civilian clothes. They took two men, Amadou and Halidou, outside and killed them with guns and machetes. In the chaos I was pulled into a separate room by hospital staff and hidden.

### **Violence outside Bria**

On November 26, nine Peuhl civilians attempted to flee the violence in Bria by walking to a cattle encampment called Dimakou, off the road to Balenguere. At the village of Golaga, 10 kilometers outside of town, the group was attacked by men with artisanal guns, knives, and machetes, said “Saidatou,” a 40-year-old woman who survived the attack:

Along the road we had been warned not to approach Golaga, but one of the men in our group, Paté, said we should just continue. When we entered Golaga a group of men attacked us. There were at least 12 men. I was shot straight away in my left arm and I fell to the ground. Paté tried to help me, but I told him to run. A man ran by and shot me again in the right arm as I lay there. He chased Paté. I heard Paté yell, “Please, please! Do not kill me!” and then I heard him killed by machete blows.

I heard my daughter-in-law, Habiba, crying out for pity. She had her 1-year-old son, Hamidou with her. I heard him crying. Then I heard a shot and the crying stopped. I heard my daughter Salamatou crying too. She was with her 2-year-old daughter Adama, who was also crying. Then I heard them killed by machetes. I got up and ran into the bush, but I could not find my two grandsons who were with me, Saladin (age 3) and Abou Aziz (age 7). I think they are also dead. I spent the day in the bush and then came back to Gobolo.

On November 26, a 20-year-old man was fishing with two friends in a stream outside of Bria near the village Kpakaba. He said he was resting in an area away from the stream when three uniformed Peuhl fighters approached him, “One of them said, ‘If you cry out we will kill you.’ They made me sit down and one of them took out a knife and cut my right Achilles tendon. I don’t know why they did it. I think they wanted to ensure I could not walk. They just told me again that if I cried out I would be shot. When they were done cutting the tendon, they left. Now I can barely move.” Human Rights Watch saw a deep wound above the man’s right heel.

On November 27, UPC fighters shot a 17-year-old boy, Jean Richard Walakouzou, three kilometers outside of Bria as he rode his bicycle to see his family, who were hiding in the fields outside of town. A person who was with him and survived the attack told authorities and relatives of the victim that the fighters shot Walakouzou in the chest and shoulder without warning.

A 35-year-old man said that a Peuhl fighter shot at him on November 28, but missed. “It was between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. and I was finishing work in the fields,” he told Human

Rights Watch on the day of the attack. “As I was cutting manioc I saw a Peuhl in uniform in front of me. He said nothing, he just shot at me. I fell to the ground and ran.”

On November 29, uniformed Peuhl fighters apparently shot and killed 50-year-old Saleh Yousef, a non-Peuhl Muslim from Bria, one kilometer from town on the Gobolo road near the Pimba stream. Bria residents said they saw the fighters leaving the area where the unarmed Yousef, a diamond miner, was killed moments after hearing shots.

# Getting Away with Murder in Central African Republic

*Author: Lewis Mudge, Africa researcher, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/17/getting-away-murder-central-african-republic>

**November 17, 2016 – Commentary published in *Jeune Afrique***

In the [Central African Republic](#) last month, I met with Seleka commanders whose forces were accused of just having [razed a camp](#) for internally displaced people in the town of Kaga-Bandoro, killing 37 people. They denied responsibility, of course, but when I mentioned that those responsible could be held accountable, they chuckled. The notion that anyone in the Central African Republic would be punished for killings and other war crimes seemed like a joke.



The new displacement camp in Kaga Bandoro, around the MINUSCA base and airstrip, where approximately 15,000 people sought shelter after the Seleka attack on October 12. © Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

It is easy to see why they think so. Since 2013, when the country [descended into a spiral](#) of political and communal violence, killing thousands of civilians, war criminals on all sides have walked free. Women and girls have been [raped](#) and used as sex slaves, villages have been [burned](#), and more than 837,000 people remain [displaced](#). But those responsible among the Seleka and anti-balaka have yet to face punishment. They are free to rape, pillage and kill again.

This week the international community has a chance to help end that deadly trend. The [Brussels conference](#) for the Central African Republic on November 17, organized by the European Union to bring the government and donors together, will give the new authorities in Bangui a platform to outline their priorities and the country's partners a chance to present their plans.

No simple solution exists, of course, and the country needs a comprehensive program for peace, security and development. But financial and political support to the Central African government's nearly non-functional judicial system is desperately needed to help stem the violence that continues to tear this country apart.

Concretely, donors should support the innovative judicial institution that gives central Africans some hope: the [Special Criminal Court](#) (SSC). Established in June 2015, the court consists of national and international staff and has a mandate to investigate and prosecute the gravest crimes committed in the country since 2003, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

This court offers the best chance to address serious crimes, break the cycles of impunity, and help strengthen the justice system overall. It will also serve as a necessary partner to the International Criminal Court, which has a mandate to prosecute crimes since August 2012 but will only go after a handful of high-level suspects.

Unfortunately, funding gaps and administrative hurdles have impeded making the court operational. The justice minister announced in August that the international prosecutor would be named by the end of the year, but the appointment of national judges has lagged.

The donors meeting in Brussels can help get the court up and running by giving the body its unqualified support. Donors should commit their support for a full five-year cycle of the



court, instead of putting up smaller amounts of money, piecemeal. They should make clear that lasting security and development requires justice. At the same time, the government should order the committees tasked with nominating court officials to expedite their work. And it should stress that accountability for serious crimes forms a central pillar of its stabilization strategy.

A functioning Special Criminal Court will not resolve all of the country's deep-seated problems. But holding abusers to account can help people regain faith in state institution and heal communal relations.

Conversely, the failure to hold killers accountable makes them feel free to kill again. And with every attack on a village, with every civilian killed, donor money for peace and security – including more than 500 million euros from the European Union since 2013 and over 1.8 billion euros for the UN peacekeeping mission – carries significantly less weight.

# Central African Republic: Justice is Key to Recovery and Peace-Building

*Joint Civil Society Appeal to Donors*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/16/central-african-republic-justice-key-recovery-and-peace-building>

**November 16, 2016 – Press release**

As the European Union is organizing a [conference](#) in Brussels to discuss priorities for the Central African Republic (CAR), the undersigned 17 international and Central African human rights organizations call on states and international organizations to urgently pledge financial and technical support to the Special Criminal Court (SCC). We further call on the international community to support efforts by the Central African authorities to take leadership and guide efforts to effectively operationalize the SCC.

Grappling with the CAR's longstanding history of impunity for crimes under international law, and considering the numerous challenges facing the country, justice must remain a priority. Holding perpetrators to account in fair trials—and in doing so, exposing the truth behind the commission of crimes—can help end cycles of violence, and have a lasting impact on peace and reconciliation.

The Central African Republic faces a difficult security situation, which has deteriorated in recent months. Nonetheless, in September, President Touadera [reassured](#) the UN General Assembly that the Central African Republic has “turned its back on past dark days,” and reaffirmed his government's commitment to ending impunity. The international community should maintain its sustained commitment to the Central African Republic, and to justice, in particular, to ensure the country does not descend into another crisis.

The Central African justice system remains too weak to effectively investigate and prosecute mass atrocity crimes. The International Criminal Court's investigation in the Central African Republic offers victims another much-needed path to justice, but simply cannot address more than a decade of crimes under international law, as it will likely target only a small number of suspects. The SCC, with its complement of international and national staff and expertise, has the potential to deliver much-needed justice to the many

victims of crimes under international law since 2003. Moreover, a strong, functional SCC can have a positive impact on the Central African judicial system, in terms of sharing expertise, strengthening capacities and showing that credible justice is possible. But to realize its potential, donor support for the SCC is crucial.

### **Funding for the Special Criminal Court**

Strong investigations help determine the success of the steps that follow. Indeed, cases built on a solid evidentiary foundation, followed by trials that are and are seen to be fair, help inspire confidence in the rule of law.

Security for core judicial staff is also important; judges, prosecutors, and lawyers cannot effectively do their jobs if they fear for their safety. Protection for victims and witnesses is similarly critical. Making legal aid available to victims means they can exercise their right to participate in proceedings, while legal aid for indigent defendants can help ensure the fairness of the proceedings. At all stages, effective outreach can promote awareness of the court's role and functioning, manage expectations, and contribute to building national ownership over the justice process.

Over the next five years, the SCC is estimated to cost 40 million USD. Of that amount, only 5 million USD has been raised, leaving a funding gap of 35 million USD. We urge donors to ensure continued engagement with the SCC as the court works to fulfill its mandate.

### **Staffing**

As we have highlighted in a previous [statement](#), the recruitment of qualified, independent, and motivated national and international personnel will help determine the Special Criminal Court's success.

It is expected the recruitment process for international staff will soon be underway, including for the magistrates, the investigating judges, the prosecutor, and the deputy registrar. We urge your governments to propose the most qualified candidates for the positions, and to press for a transparent selection process that prioritizes competence above other considerations.

Recruited judges, consultants, and experts should speak French and be familiar with the civil law system, on which the Central African judiciary system is based. Judges should have expertise in investigating and prosecuting crimes under international law. The deployment of international judges, consultants, and experts who do not have the

necessary prior specialized experience investigating and trying crimes under international law can be counterproductive and undermine the court's legitimacy.

Similarly, we look to the Central African authorities to show leadership and ongoing political support to the SCC, which should translate into concrete steps such as the appointment of qualified national staff.

The Central African Republic is facing many challenges, including demobilizing combatants, security sector reform, and the protection of civilians, as it struggles to rebuild after years of conflict. However, bringing perpetrators of the worst crimes to justice in credible trials should be at the forefront of the international community's priorities. We hope your government or intergovernmental organization will provide financial, technical, and political support to the SCC as outlined above.

Bangui, November 16, 2016

**The organizations supporting the declaration are:**

*Action des chrétiens contre la torture (ACAT - RCA)*

*Amnesty International*

*Association des femmes juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC)*

*Association des victimes de la LRA en Centrafrique (AVLRAC)*

*Avocats Sans Frontières*

*Civis et démocratie (CIDEM)*

*Commission épiscopale Justice et Paix*

*Enough Project*

*Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)*

*Human Rights Watch*

*Lead-Centrafrique*

*Ligue centrafricaine des droits de l'Homme (LCDH)*

*Mouvement pour la défense des droits de l'Homme et de l'action humanitaire (MDDH)*

*Observatoire centrafricain des droits de l'Homme (OCDH)*

*Observatoire pour la promotion de l'Etat de Droit - OPED*

*Parliamentarians for Global Action*

*REDRESS*

## Central African Republic: Support the Special Criminal Court

*Make Justice a Priority at Donors' Conference in Brussels*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/16/central-african-republic-support-special-criminal-court>

### **November 16, 2016 – Press release**

Donor countries meeting in Brussels on November 17, 2016, should support the Central African Republic's Special Criminal Court, 17 Central African and international human rights non-governmental organizations said in a declaration today. The donors should provide technical, financial, and political support for the court and its mandate to end impunity for crimes under international law, the groups said. On November 17, 2016, the European Union will host a conference in Brussels to discuss funding priorities for the Central African Republic.

In June 2015, the Central African Republic's government adopted a law to create the court to pave the way to justice for victims, but the court has yet to become operational. "The Central African Republic has been the theater of repeated cycles of horrific abuse for over a decade, without any consequences for those responsible," the human rights organizations said. "Donors should back efforts aimed at making the Special Criminal Court operational to break this vicious cycle of impunity, and the Central African authorities should show leadership in following through."

After nearly a decade of intermittent conflict, in late 2012, the Central African Republic spiraled into violence, with armed groups known as the Seleka and anti-Balaka committing serious abuses against civilians including murder, sexual violence, and destruction of property, which led to massive displacement. In October, tensions erupted again, with displacement camps in the center of the country attacked and scores of civilians shot, stabbed or burned to death.

In 2014, the then-transitional government referred the situation in the Central African Republic since August 1, 2012 to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, opened an investigation in September 2014. The government's cooperation with the ICC is critical, but the ICC's investigation, which is ongoing, will most likely only target only a handful of suspects. The Special Criminal Court, with its proposed international and national staff, is critical to address more than a decade of serious crimes and help strengthen the justice system overall.

**The organizations supporting the declaration are:**

*Action des chrétiens contre la torture (ACAT - RCA)*

*Amnesty International*

*Association des femmes juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC)*

*Association des victimes de la LRA en Centrafrique (AVLRAC)*

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*Mouvement pour la défense des droits de l'Homme et de l'action humanitaire (MDDH)*

*Observatoire centrafricain des droits de l'Homme (OCDH)*

*Observatoire pour la promotion de l'Etat de Droit - OPED*

*Parliamentarians for Global Action*

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# Central African Republic: Deadly Raid on Displaced People

*UN Peacekeepers Should Offer Increased Protection*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/01/central-african-republic-deadly-raid-displaced-people>

**November 1, 2016 – Press release**



A man inspects his burned hut in L'Évêché displacement camp, Central African Republic, on October 12. Seleka forces burned at least 435 huts in the camp. © Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

Seleka rebels killed at least 37 civilians, wounded 57, and forced thousands to flee when they razed a camp for displaced people in the [Central African Republic](#) on October 12, 2016. United Nations peacekeepers deployed outside the camp in the town of Kaga-Bandoro failed to halt the attack.

Human Rights Watch interviewed 32 victims and witnesses in Kaga-Bandoro and in the country's capital, Bangui, between October 14 and 21. They said that the mostly Muslim

Seleka forces, possibly with assistance from Muslim civilians, shot, stabbed, or burned to death the civilians, including at least four women, five children, three older people, and four people with disabilities. The casualty numbers are most likely higher because some victims were buried quickly. In addition to field research, Human Rights Watch, using [satellite imagery analysis](#), identified at least 175 destroyed homes in the neighborhoods around the camp and 435 destroyed huts in the camp itself.

“This vicious attack targeted residents who were already forced from their homes by fighting and had already been through so much,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Deadly attacks like these show why UN peacekeepers were given a mandate to protect civilians with all necessary means – and why they need to enforce it.”



L'Évêché displacement camp in Kaga Bandoro Central African Republic, on October 19, 2016, one week after the Seleka attack. © Edouard Dropsy for Human Rights Watch

The UN has 12,870 forces in its Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), including 70 police officers and 200 soldiers who were in Kaga-Bandoro at the time of the attack. Witnesses said the peacekeepers failed to stop at least 60 armed Seleka forces from crossing a UN-guarded bridge and attacking the

civilians, although some peacekeepers later opened fire and killed 12 Seleka on the outskirts of the camp. No national security forces, such as police or gendarmes, have been in the town since the Seleka took it over in December 2012.

On October 31, MINUSCA issued a [report](#) on Kaga-Bandoro that documented 37 civilian deaths and assigned primary responsibility for “grave human rights and humanitarian law violations” to Seleka forces, though it attributed two of the deaths to anti-balaka militia. The report praised MINUSCA forces for having taken “strong measures to protect civilians during the crisis.”

The UN should urgently deploy more of the mission’s forces to the volatile central region, expand their patrols and, consistent with the mission’s mandate, use appropriate force to protect civilians under imminent threat, Human Rights Watch said.

In addition, the national government, the UN, and donors to the Central African Republic should increase their support for the [Special Criminal Court \(SCC\)](#) – a new judicial body with national and international judges and prosecutors that has a mandate to investigate and prosecute grave human rights violations committed in the country since 2003. In August, justice minister Flavien Mbata announced that the international prosecutor for the SCC would be named before the end of 2016.

The new court offers a meaningful opportunity to hold accountable commanders on all sides of the conflict who are responsible for war crimes, such as those committed at Kaga-Bandoro, Human Rights Watch said.

Such attacks are also subject to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In September 2014, the ICC prosecutor announced the opening of an investigation in the Central African Republic into crimes dating from August 2012.

Fighting has raged in the Central African Republic since December 2012, when the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels, claiming to represent the country’s aggrieved Muslim minority from the northeast, moved southwest into more populated non-Muslim areas, [killing thousands of civilians](#). In mid-2013, Christian and animist militias, called the anti-balaka, formed to fight back, themselves committing serious human rights abuses.



In response to atrocities by both sides, the African Union (AU) increased the numbers of peacekeepers in the country in 2013. The AU was transferred to a UN mission in September 2014.

On October 12, the town of Kaga-Bandoro, capital of the Nana Grébizi province, had approximately 30,000 inhabitants, plus about 3,000 displaced people from other parts of the region who had sought shelter there. Another roughly 7,000 people were sheltering in a displacement camp in a town called l'Évêché, behind the town's Catholic parish.

October 3, 2016



October 24, 2016



Satellite imagery of L'Évêché IDP camp in Kaga Bandoro. At least 37 civilians were killed and 435 huts burned when Seleka fighters attacked the camp on October 12.

The Seleka attack began between 8 and 9 a.m., apparently as a reaction to the killing of a Seleka fighter the previous night. Armed fighters, some in civilian clothes, crossed the bridge, which separates the Muslim neighborhood from the rest of the town, and almost immediately started shooting at civilians and attacking them with machetes and knives.

“People were yelling and telling me to flee,” said a 70-year-old man from the Catholic Mission neighborhood. “As I ran I saw bodies on the ground. The Seleka were shooting at everybody. I ran to the church, but it was attacked, so I ran to the displacement camp. Just a few minutes later the camp was attacked too.”

Within minutes, Seleka fighters moved past UN peacekeepers who were protecting the l’Évêché camp. Some peacekeepers opened fire, killing 12 Seleka, but could not stop other Seleka from entering the camp, attacking its residents, and burning grass huts to the ground.

Immediately following the assault, Seleka forces also attacked at least three villages along the road between Kaga-Bandoro and Botto, killing at least four people and burning 75 homes.

The attacks displaced people from Kaga-Bandoro and the surrounding villages. At least 20,000 of them are now in a makeshift camp around a UN peacekeeping base near the Kaga-Bandoro airstrip. Between October 18 and 21, Human Rights Watch observed squalid conditions at the camp, including insufficient numbers of toilets and food shortages that require an urgent humanitarian response. The conditions place a particular burden on people with disabilities.

UN officials told Human Rights Watch on October 20 that they would deploy more police in Kaga-Bandoro in January 2017, doubling the number to 140. The increase will be helpful but should be expedited, Human Rights Watch said.

Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, MINUSCA is authorized to take all necessary means to “protect... the civilian population from threat of physical violence” and to “implement a mission-wide protection strategy.” The protection is also urgently needed to secure aid deliveries, Human Rights Watch said.

Seleka leaders in Kaga-Bandoro told Human Rights Watch that their fighters did not participate in the October 12 attack. However, several witnesses and victims identified Seleka fighters by name. Two residents, interviewed separately, for example, said they saw Seleka [General Saleh Zabadi](#) on a motorcycle near the provincial hospital, one of the sites where victims and witnesses said there had been attacks and killings. On October 20 and 21, Human Rights Watch saw Seleka fighters, many in civilian clothes but carrying arms, moving freely around the town's Muslim neighborhood.

"Seleka are openly circulating around town with their arms, sending a message that they feel untouchable by the law, a message not lost on civilians," Mudge said. "Arrests and prosecutions are urgently needed to break the country's deadly cycle of violence."

### **Central African Republic in Crisis**

The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when the Seleka began a military campaign against the government of Francois Bozizé. The Seleka took control of Bangui in March 2013. Their rule was marked by widespread [human rights abuses](#), including the wanton [killing of civilians](#). In mid-2013, anti-balaka militia organized to fight the Seleka. Associating all Muslims with the Seleka, the anti-balaka carried out large scale [reprisal attacks against Muslim civilians](#) in Bangui and [western parts](#) of the country.

Thousands of civilians have been killed by both sides, hundreds of thousands have fled their homes, and nearly half-a-million people – many of them Muslims fleeing anti-balaka attacks – have taken refuge in neighboring countries. Fighters on both sides have committed rape, and they continue to use sexual violence to [punish women and girls](#) suspected of interacting with people on the other side of the sectarian divide.

### **The Seleka in Nana Grébizi Province**

AU and French peacekeeping forces pushed the Seleka out of Bangui in early 2014, forcing the group to the central and eastern regions of the country. Ethnic divisions, rivalries, disagreements over resource control, and disputes over strategy quickly tore the Seleka apart. By late 2014, the Seleka split into several factions each controlling its own area.

Two Seleka groups are in Kaga-Bandoro: the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique*, FPRC) and the Central African Patriotic Movement (*Mouvement Patriotique pour la Centrafrique*, MPC).



While the two factions have jockeyed for power in Kaga-Bandoro, they have also united when mutually beneficial. In June, they created a “mixed brigade” with about 40 fighters to conduct joint patrols. On October 21, the FPRC political cabinet director, Lambert Lissane, told Human Rights Watch that the brigade members move around town on motorcycles without uniforms. Lissane maintained that the brigade is unarmed but, on October 20 and 21, a Human Rights Watch researcher saw armed men on motorcycles whom residents identified as members of the mixed brigade.

### **The Violence in Ndomete**

In early September, anti-balaka militia established a roadblock on the road between Kaga-Bandoro and Ndomete, 10 kilometers away, apparently after MINUSCA pressured the Seleka to remove a roadblock in Ndomete, which the Seleka refused to do. Militia and rebel fighters use the roadblocks to extort money from civilians.

On September 16, Seleka fighters descended on Ndomete and killed six civilians, four witnesses told Human Rights Watch. Initial reports by the national government indicated that as many as 26 people had been killed but neither the UN nor Human Rights Watch were able to confirm that number. Lissane, the FPRC political leader, told Human Rights Watch that Seleka fighters were preempting an imminent attack by the anti-balaka. The UN and Human Rights Watch did not find evidence to support Lissane’s claim. A resident of Ndomete said:

The Seleka came on motorcycles and with pickup trucks in the morning. They started to shoot at people in their homes. They found me outside my house and debated whether to kill me or not. As they talked, I watched as some Seleka found a [artisanal] hunting [shot]gun in my neighbor’s home. They assumed he was anti-balaka. He said he was not and offered to pay 200,000 francs [approximately US\$340], but they [the Seleka fighters] said it was not enough and they cut his throat.

In the aftermath of the Ndomete attack, MINUSCA increased its [presence](#) on the road between the town and Kaga-Bandoro and a MINUSCA police unit was sent to Kaga-Bandoro.

October 3, 2016



October 24, 2016



Satellite imagery of Dagaza, 7 kilometers from Kaga-Bandoro on the road to Botto, was attacked and burned on October 12 by the Seleka after they attacked L'Évêché IDP camp in Kaga-Bandoro.

### **The Violence in Kaga-Bandoro**

On October 11 representatives of the town's Muslim organization marched toward the administrative buildings to deliver a manifesto calling for the re-installation of the Seleka road block at Ndomete, the cessation of checks by the UN at the bridge leading into the Muslim neighborhood, dialogue between the government and armed groups, and the

replacement of the Rwandan MINUSCA police unit in town, which they accused of targeting Muslims.

Tensions were high in the Muslim neighborhood when the body of Mahamat Oumar, a Seleka fighter, was discovered early in the morning of October 12 in the TP (*Travaux Public*) neighborhood. Oumar's body was transported to the local mosque, where a crowd gathered. Seleka leaders, including the MPC general Mahamat Al Khatim and the FPRC's Lissane, told Human Rights Watch that they tried without success to calm the growing and agitated crowd.

Between 8 and 9 a.m. fighters from the Muslim side of town crossed over to the non-Muslim side. The first group of about 20 people was armed mostly with knives, machetes, and grenades, witness said. A second group of about 20 people came with Kalashnikov rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, followed by about 20 more men on motorcycles. UN peacekeepers on the bridge were unable to halt the fighters. As soon as the Seleka crossed into the non-Muslim side, they attacked civilians.

An early target was a school where a teacher training course was being held. One participant said:

A group of Seleka fighters came into the courtyard of the school. It was about 15 men. They were armed with knives and grenades. When we saw them we ran to the church. But other Seleka arrived on motos and cut us off, so we ran into the neighborhood. Some [Seleka fighters] were wearing mixed uniforms and civilian's clothes. They started to shoot directly at us. One teacher, Kango, was sick and he could not keep up, he was captured and stabbed to death. I watched as they killed him. I learned later that another teacher, the director of the training center, was also killed when they found him in the neighborhood.

Some civilians sought safety at the provincial hospital, on the border between the two neighborhoods. However, Seleka fighters killed and seriously wounded people as they tried to enter the building. A 37-year-old man who was injured said:

I wanted to run to the hospital because I knew there were peacekeepers there, but there were Seleka in front of it. One saw me and yelled, “You are anti-balaka.” Just next to me they shot a man running for the hospital. I decided to try to enter the hospital. Two Seleka grabbed me, threw me to the ground and one stabbed me in the chest with a sword. My intestines spilled out, but I was still in front of the hospital, so I put them back in and put pressure on the wound. I staggered to the hospital and found a doctor who did an emergency surgery.

Human Rights Watch interviewed the man three days after these events and saw a large wound on his chest and stomach.

A 43-year-old man said he saw the Seleka kill a sick elderly man: “The Seleka shot him with a homemade gun, but then they walked up to him and finished him off with machetes.” Another man, 37, watched attackers kill his 40-year-old brother: “He was shot twice while he was running and he fell. Then two men ran up and stabbed him to death in his back with a knife.”

The Seleka fighters targeted suspected anti-balaka, but killed many civilians. A 30-year-old woman from the Gbaya neighborhood interviewed in the hospital said:

They found my 17-year-old son and took him outside and started to hit him with machetes. As they were giving him the final blow I put myself in front of them to save him. I had a baby on my back but they hit me in the arm with the machete anyway and cut it open. I screamed, “He is not anti-balaka, why do you want to kill him?” A fighter said back, “Don’t stop us from killing your people. You killed one of ours, we will kill yours.” They did not hit me with the machete again, but instead they killed my father in law, who was just next to me, with machete blows to his head. He was 60 years old.

The woman showed Human Rights Watch the bandage on her left arm, above the elbow, where she said she was struck. Her son was also recovering in the hospital.

Seleka fighters were able to quickly move past UN peacekeepers who were guarding about 7,000 people in l'Évêché. Some peacekeepers opened fire, killing 12 Seleka fighters.

As soon as they entered the camp, Seleka fighters began shooting at civilians, including women and children, witnesses said.

A woman of about 60 from the nearby village of Ngouleka I, who had been living in l'Évêché for three years, said:

When I first heard the shots I went back into my hut to hide. A short time later, I could feel heat coming from other huts that were set ablaze. I went outside and saw my neighbor's hut burning. I turned around and I saw that mine was burning as well. I started to run to the MINUSCA base, but a young Seleka fighter that I recognized saw me and shot me in the leg. I was helped by others who were fleeing and I was taken to the hospital at the MINUSCA base.

Human Rights Watch interviewed the woman on October 19, and observed what looked like a gunshot wound on her left lower leg. She was receiving medical care from MINUSCA.

A 23-year-old man said he looked for his 17-year-old wife, his two-month-old child and his wife's three-year-old sister after the attack:

When the attack started I ran to the MINUSCA base hoping to find my family there. When people started to arrive I did not see them so I went down to the camp to look. I saw two dead bodies but it was not them. I found my family near our house... My wife had been shot in the stomach. Our baby had been shot in the head. My wife's sister looked like she had been shot in the leg. Everything around them was burned and destroyed. We had to bury them in a mass grave.

A 40-year-old widow and mother of six from Ngoulepa II, north of Kaga Bandoro, said she could not take all of her children as she fled:

It seemed like all of the sudden there was shooting everywhere and the kids were running left and right. I just ran and took some of the small kids with me. I learned later that my son Justin Soubanoyo was killed. He was 6 years old. He was shot in the side.

A 15-year-old boy from the Catholic Mission neighborhood said he saw his friend, also 15, get killed: “From my hiding place I saw Vianny running. He was shot in the right arm and fell. A group of five men fell onto him and stabbed him to death. When he was dead they saw me and they chased me, but I ran and hid behind a house. Vianny was a student, he was not anti-balaka.”

People with disabilities were both targeted in the attack and killed in the fires. As the attack started, “Janet,” a resident of the Catholic Mission neighborhood, sought shelter at a neighbor’s home with a local man, Bakoudou Kankandi, who is deaf and does not speak. Seleka fighters soon broke down the door asking if there were men in the home. Janet told them no, she said. “They made us come out of the house and told us to go to the MINUSCA base,” Janet said. “But when they saw Bankoudou, they said, ‘You said there were no men here. Is this not a man?’ I said, ‘No, he is deaf and dumb, he does not understand.’ But they shot him anyway.”

At least three older people with disabilities were left behind at the displacement site and burned to death in the fire, survivors said.

A relative of Gilbert Bingimale, an older man who could not walk, said that the family had to leave Bingimale in the hut so they could save the children. “It was burned down and when we came back later we found him still there. He must have hidden thinking he would be safe. All his skin had burned off.”

A relative of Pauline Pharama, a 70-year-old blind woman, said he could not reach Pharama after the attack started. He said he returned the next morning and found her body charred and eaten by dogs.

After Seleka forces destroyed the l’Évêché camp, the violence continued in areas around Kaga-Bandoro, witnesses said. A 31-year-old woman from Baïko, a neighborhood in the northern part of town, said:



I saw people running from the neighborhood and I was nervous. Around noon I heard motorcycles approaching and I hid in the bush near the house. The Seleka came to our compound. They were in civilian clothes, but they were armed with guns and swords. My niece was there with her five-day old baby, Emmanuel Sadrak. She tried to flee, but a Seleka shot her. The bullet killed her and the baby. My sister ran out of the house and tried to help her, but she was also shot. She is not dead. After they shot them, the Seleka pillaged the house. We tried to bring my niece to the hospital, but she was already dead. We buried the baby there at the house.

Due to security concerns, Human Rights Watch could not reach villages on the roads leading out of Kaga-Bandoro. In the days following the attack, however, displaced people from those villages streamed into the town. Villages along the road to Botto, west of Kaga-Bandoro, were apparently attacked on the afternoon of October 12. A resident of Beguete I, a village along this road, said:

Late in the morning people started to run down the road saying that the Seleka had attacked the town center. A few minutes later some motorcycles carrying Seleka drove by, but they quickly turned around. They then came back with more fighters. They started to shoot at the villages along the road. We heard the shooting and we fled. From a distance I saw them burn my village.

Seleka FPRC fighters had destroyed villages along this road in February 2015, but some residents had rebuilt their homes. Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch indicates that at least 75 homes on this road were destroyed in October. “I had just rebuilt my house and only spent five months in it before it was burned down again,” said a newly displaced 47-year-old widow from Zefio, five kilometers from Kaga-Bandoro, “I’m exhausted.”

On October 13, the day after the attack, some people left the makeshift displacement camp at the UN base in Kaga-Bandoro to look for possessions that might have been left behind after the attack and looting in other neighborhoods, but they too were targeted. One woman said she saw a man killed near the abandoned Bomou area:

I heard a moto arrive and I hid in the bush. Three Seleka arrived and saw a man. They called him over saying, “We won’t hurt you.” So he approached them. They spoke for a moment and I heard the man yell, “Don’t kill me!” But a Seleka pulled out a knife and stabbed him in the neck. I crawled away, but I turned around and saw the man’s body at a distance.

October 3, 2016



October 24, 2016



Satellite imagery of the Catholic Mission neighborhood in Kaga-Bandoro. Seleka fighters burned this neighborhood before they attacked L’Évêché IDP camp, destroying 175 homes.

## **Seleka Response**

In a meeting with Human Rights Watch, General Al Khatim, the military head of the MPC, insisted that Seleka fighters did not participate in the October 12 attack, blaming armed Muslim civilians from the town instead. He accused MINUSCA of failing to protect civilians. Lissane, the political director of the FPRC, also said that no FPRC fighters had participated in the attack. He justified the assault, however, saying that anti-balaka fighters had used the camp as a base. He maintained the camp was attacked because anti-balaka fighters had started a fight outside the camp with members of the Muslim community. While anti-balaka were living around the l'Évêché camp, they were armed with machetes, a few artisanal hunting guns and a handful of grenades, according to witnesses and camp residents. No one else interviewed by Human Rights Watch confirmed Lissane's version of events.

The attack at l'Évêché has increased tensions and mistrust between people in Kaga-Bandoro and MINUSCA forces. Human Rights Watch heard numerous rumors in the town that Pakistani peacekeepers had supplied the Seleka with guns, munitions, and support before and during the attack, but found no evidence to support this claim.

In an interview with local media, the minister of public security, interior and territorial administration, Jean-Serge Bokassa, seemed to encourage negative attitudes toward the Pakistanis. "What is the role of the Pakistani contingent in Kaga-Bandoro?" he [said](#) on October 15. "Their connivance with armed groups has lasted too long."

## **Background: A Legacy of Displacement Camp Attacks**

### ***Saint Notre Dam Parish – Bangui***

On May 28, 2014, a group of armed civilians, possibly mixed with Seleka fighters, attacked the Notre Dam Parish in the Fatima neighborhood of Bangui, killing 17 people. The parish had served as a displaced camp for thousands of residents displaced from Bangui since a major offensive launched by the anti-balaka on the capital on December 5, 2013. At the time, local camp officials told Human Rights Watch that roughly 5,800 people lived in the camp on the day of the attack.

The attack occurred just after a heated street battle between the anti-balaka and Muslim self-defense groups. Muslim militiamen told Human Rights Watch they believed that some

of the anti-balaka had sought shelter among the displaced people at the church. The 17 deaths recorded by Human Rights Watch were all civilians, including women and children.

### ***Saint Joseph's Parish – Bambari***

In June 2014 a deadly [cycle of sectarian violence](#) escalated in the Ouaka Province, resulting in at least 62 deaths between June 9 and 23. The attacks, by both Seleka and anti-balaka fighters, were retaliatory in nature, indicating a growing cycle of tit-for-tat revenge killings between the communities. Most of the victims were men who were chopped to death by machetes. The violence culminated with a brutal attack on July 7 by suspected Seleka rebels on thousands of displaced people taking shelter at Bambari's Saint Joseph's Parish and the adjacent Bishop's residence. The [attack killed at least 27 people](#). The Seleka fighters were under the command of General Ali Darassa, the head of a group that would later emerge as Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (*l'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique*, UPC).

### ***Ngakobo/SUCAF – Ngakobo***

On December 3, 2015, Seleka UPC fighters attacked a displacement camp at Ngakobo, approximately 60 kilometers from Bambari, which housed an estimated 4,500 displaced people, killing eight. Ngakobo was [attacked](#) again on October 15, 2016 by armed men, killing 13 civilians. UPC representatives denied to [international media](#) that its fighters were responsible for the attack. Human Rights Watch was not able to verify the circumstances of the attack or who was responsible for the more recent attack.

# A Chance for UN Peacekeeping to Get It Right

## Investigate, Prosecute Peacekeepers Accused of Sexual Assault

*Author: Hillary Margolis, Women's Rights researcher, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/07/chance-un-peacekeeping-get-it-right>

### September 7, 2016 – Dispatch

Thérèse, a 14-year-old in the Central African Republic, probably doesn't know that defense ministers from around the globe will [meet in London](#) on Thursday this week to discuss United Nations peacekeeping. But she has a stake in what happens there.

Thérèse was one of eight girls and women who told Human Rights Watch [peacekeepers raped them](#) in the eastern town of Bambari. Thérèse described how a peacekeeper grabbed her as she passed a UN base. "We walked for a while," she said. "Then he ripped off my clothes and used them to tie my hands behind my back. He threw me on the ground, placed his gun to the side, and got on top of me to rape me. When he was done, he just left."

Thérèse is one of many survivors of such abuses. The UN's oversight agency received [480 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse](#) by peacekeepers between 2008 and 2013. At least 102 allegations were made against [UN peacekeepers in Haiti](#) since 2007.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pledged reforms following a scathing [independent report](#) citing UN failures in handling peacekeeper abuse. In the Central African Republic, some troops have been sent home, at least in part due to allegations of abuses, and UN and national teams launched investigations. Prosecutions began of some [peacekeepers from the Democratic Republic of Congo, accused of sexual abuse in Central African Republic](#), though there have been no convictions.

All too often when [peacekeepers hurt those they are meant to protect](#), victims get little support or justice. Only troop-contributing countries can prosecute their own forces. Prosecutions and convictions are disturbingly rare, and information on their status hard to

come by. According to Secretary-General Ban's 2015 [annual report on sexual exploitation and abuse](#), troop-contributing countries confirmed punishment of peacekeepers in only 10 cases.

Ministers meeting in London can address gaps in the system by requiring, as a precondition for participation, commitments from troop-contributing countries to hold their peacekeepers to account. Countries who don't follow through should be suspended from sending peacekeepers.

More should also be done to prevent abuses. Ministers should commit to stronger screening mechanisms to weed out soldiers and police with histories of abuse, and require military forces on [UN watchlists](#) for sexual violence and abuse of children in conflict to meet benchmarks towards changing their standing. Standardized training on human rights obligations, and consequences of violating them, should be mandatory for all troops before and during deployment.

At last year's peacekeeping summit, the US – UN peacekeeping's biggest financial contributor – [said it was committed to reform](#), including accountability for abuses. It's time such pledges yield progress.

The UN relies on more than 100,000 peacekeepers to protect civilians in places torn apart by conflict. Failure of UN and troop-contributing countries to take all measures to prevent and punish abuses by these troops is unconscionable, and undermines the very idea of peacekeeping. And survivors know this. As Thérèse said of her rapist, "There should be some justice done to this man."



## UN Human Rights Council: Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the Central African Republic

*Statement delivered under Item 10*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/28/un-human-rights-council-interactive-dialogue-independent-expert-central-african>

### **June 28, 2016 – Statement**

Fighting in the northwest of the [Central African Republic](#) and in and around the Muslim enclave in Bangui, known as PK5, continues. Scores of civilians have been killed. This recent violence has been unfolding as armed groups prey on civilians in the eastern part of the country.

Across the country armed groups have targeted women and girls. We have spoken with survivors who explained how one side had raped them as punishment for allegedly buying and selling to the other.

The interactive dialogue to assess human rights challenges on the ground with a particular focus on transitional justice is timely as impunity is a principal driver of this violence. Between 2009 and today, only one session of the criminal court (the equivalent of a jury court, which prosecutes crimes, in the Central African Republic) has taken place in the country, in Bangui in 2015, with the support of international partners. This sends a chilling message to would-be warlords. They know they can kill, rape and destroy villages and get away with it.

Investigating and prosecuting those responsible for grave international crimes is not an easy task for a national justice system marked by a lack of qualified personnel, inadequate resources, and no means to ensure the security of either magistrates or victims and witnesses.

In order to tackle these challenges and strengthen the national justice system, the interim president signed in June 2015 a law establishing a Special Criminal Court, comprised of

both national and international judges and prosecutors, to investigate and prosecute grave human rights violations committed in the country since 2003. The Special Criminal Court will work alongside the International Criminal Court on the one hand, and ordinary courts, on the other hand, which retain jurisdiction for cases that the Special Criminal Court will not select.

One year after the promulgation of the law, there have been some steps forward in setting up this court, but progress has been too slow. We are pleased that the Independent Expert used her recent visit in Bangui to encourage the national authorities to accelerate the process. We encourage the Independent Expert to use her upcoming report to present her evaluation of challenges encountered in setting up the Special Criminal Court and to make recommendations to overcome these. Principal amongst these recommendations, we believe that the national authorities should show increased leadership and urgently adopt, together with the United Nations, a roadmap, with clear deadlines, that will lead to the Special Criminal Court becoming operational.

# Central African Republic: Police Unit Killed 18 in Cold Blood

*Investigate Former Commander Implicated in Abuses*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/27/central-african-republic-police-unit-killed-18-cold-blood>

**June 27, 2016 – Press release**

(Nairobi) – Members of a special anti-crime unit in the [Central African Republic](#) unlawfully executed at least 18 people and possibly more between April 2015 and March 2016, Human Rights Watch said today.

The former director of the unit, the Central Office for the Repression of Banditry (*Office Central de Répression du Banditisme*, OCRB), Robert Yékoua-Ketté, who was removed from his position on June 8, is directly implicated in 13 of the cases and should be investigated with a view to prosecuting him.

“The government was right to remove Yékoua-Ketté as the first step in addressing impunity, but residents saw him and his men kill people in broad daylight,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Central Africans will not believe there can be rule of law and will live in fear of the OCRB unless the man they saw killing people faces justice.”



Robert Yékoua-Ketté, the former director of the Office Central de Répression du Banditisme (OCRB). © 2015 Kangbi-Ndara

Of the 18 killings, witness testimony indicates that Yékoua-Ketté personally carried out one; ordered the execution of five; and was seen at the moment when seven men, who were later killed, were detained by the OCRB.

The government of the Central African Republic should promptly open an effective, transparent investigation into all the suspected extrajudicial executions by the OCRB, which operates in the capital, Bangui, Human Rights Watch said. In light of the unit's long history of being implicated in abuses, if the investigation concludes that it is responsible for serious crimes, the government should consider disbanding the unit. Donors, including the European Union, France, and the United States, which are working with the Central African government on re-establishing security and rule of law, should ensure a focus on accountability.

Between November 2015 and April 2016, Human Rights Watch interviewed 47 people in relation to OCRB abuses, including witnesses to detention by OCRB officers, witnesses to killings, and family members of victims.

Human Rights Watch researchers documented 18 incidents of executions by the OCRB and received credible information about 12 more people similarly killed between March 2015 and March 2016. One victim, Samson Ndakouzou, 14, had been accused of stealing. Witnesses said the boy was taken with another victim to an unoccupied field where Yékoua-Ketté's men shot him, hands tied behind his back, in the back and throat. In February 2016, Human Rights Watch shared its research on these executions with senior police officials who did not dispute the findings.

Although some victims appear to have been implicated in criminal activity, Human Rights Watch concluded that the circumstances of their arrests or killings did not justify the use of lethal force, and that the killings constituted extrajudicial executions in violation of international law.

According to witnesses, Romaric Vounbo, 28 and a father of two, was killed directly by Yékoua-Ketté on October 28, 2015. They told Human Rights Watch that Yékoua-Ketté shot Vounbo twice in the stomach. When he did not collapse, one witness said: "Yékoua-Ketté told Romaric to open his mouth, but he [Vounbo] refused. Yékoua-Ketté forced his pistol into his mouth and shot him. His brains shot out from the back of his head."

Another victim, Urie Kolaba, 20, was detained on October 22, and held at the OCRB. A witness said, "Yékoua-Ketté asked Urie to give his last words to his parents, but Urie said he had nothing to say. Yékoua-Ketté told him [Kolaba] to turn around and one of his

officers shot him in the head.” Human Rights Watch saw photos of Kolaba taken at the morgue that show he was shot through his right eye.

Family members of some victims told Human Rights Watch that Yékoua-Ketté himself told them that their loved ones were killed in OCRB custody. Yékoua-Ketté told a relative of Urie Kolaba that he was no longer at the OCRB and that his body could be found at the morgue. Yékoua-Ketté personally arrested another victim, Cyril Ndourogbo, on January 14, 2016. Relatives said that on January 16, Yékoua-Ketté told them that he “had been searching for him [Ndourogbo]. Once I had him, I killed him. Look for his body in a bag on the Oubangui River.”

In other cases, Human Rights Watch was able to confirm through eyewitness testimony that the OCRB arrested the victim, whose body was found either the same day or a few days later, along the banks of the Oubangui River. Human Rights Watch also documented two cases, and heard of several others, in which prisoners’ families were forced to pay Yékoua-Ketté a bribe in order to secure the release of their relative from the OCRB jail.

Human Rights Watch found that 16 of the victims were unarmed when they were detained and did not pose any threat to the life of police officers or the public. Two were allegedly armed when they were initially detained, but were disarmed by police officers and later killed. Two other victims were suspected of throwing grenades in an attempted robbery, injuring at least five people, but were unarmed when detained, and killed. Human Rights Watch confirmed that at least five individuals, including Samson Ndakouzou, 14, were held in an OCRB jail before being summarily executed.

Human Rights Watch met with Yékoua-Ketté in November 2015. He said that the levels of crime in Bangui had risen, particularly since a prison break at the [Ngaragba Central Prison](#) in Bangui, and that he had “too much work to do with too little resources,” but that he made sure his men operated within the law.

Human Rights Watch shared its research findings with the transitional government and called for Yékoua-Ketté’s suspension and investigation in a private letter on March 29, 2016, and again in a letter to the current government – which took [over](#) on March 30, 2016 – on April 26, 2016.



**Top row, from left to right:** Alfred Yawi (Killed between April 24 and April 26, 2015); Nathan Badi (Killed on July 31, 2015); Emmanuel Régavé (Killed on October 22, 2015); Urie Kolaba (Killed on October 24, 2015).

**Middle row, from left to right:** Romaric Vounbo (Killed on October 28, 2015); Jordi Befio (Killed between December 5 and December 7, 2015); Raymond Gongalut (Killed on either December 24 or 25, 2015); Senele Ombade (killed on January 10, 2016).

**Bottom row, from left to right:** Rufen Balekouzou (killed between January 17 and January 20, 2016); Jean-Noël Bebona (killed on January 27, 2016); Gervais Magna (killed on November 4, 2015); Hervé Zangouli (killed on either March 4 or 5, 2016).

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Human Rights Watch received no response from transitional government authorities. However, senior members of the current government assured Human Rights Watch that action would be taken to remove Yékoua-Ketté from his post. Since then, senior justice



officials have told Human Rights Watch they are ready to investigate the killings and move forward with judicial proceedings if the allegations are founded.

“Robert Yékoua-Ketté and his officers clearly felt they could execute people with complete impunity,” Mudge said. “The new government, with international support, made the right decision to remove Yékoua-Ketté, but now it needs to show the Central African people that even ‘untouchable’ commanders will be held to account.”

The human rights division of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA, has investigated killings by the OCRB since March 2015 and raised the issue repeatedly, both informally and in official correspondences, with transitional authorities and authorities in the new government. Yékoua-Ketté admitted to MINUSCA officials that he had ordered the killings of at least two men, Nathan Badi and Saint-Cyr Dezoua. Both men were killed by OCRB officers in Miskine neighborhood on July 31, 2015.

International and Central African Republic law prohibits arbitrary killings and summary executions of detainees or suspects. The United Nations Basic Principles of the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials require that law enforcement officials use nonviolent means whenever possible and use lethal force only to protect life. The principles also require governments to ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials is punished as a criminal offense under the law.

Several family members of victims told Human Rights Watch they would file suit against Yékoua-Ketté in the local courts if they felt safe to do so. MINUSCA’s mandate includes providing support to the national police and judicial institutions. This support could also include witness protection in sensitive cases such as the prosecution of Yékoua-Ketté for murders committed by himself or men under his command.

MINUSCA should offer judicial, investigative and protection assistance to the national government in its efforts to seek accountability for crimes committed by the OCRB.

“It is a good thing that Yékoua-Ketté was removed from his post, but it must not end there,” the father of one victim told Human Rights Watch. “I carry my son’s photo with me and I

will carry it until the day that Yékoua-Ketté explains before a judge why he killed my son in cold blood.”

### **The OCRB**

The OCRB is a special police unit created to address the rise in banditry following a string of army mutinies in 1996 and 1997. The unit has historically been most active in Bangui. From 2006 to 2013, it was implicated in unlawful detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings, including the [high-profile](#) 2012 disappearance of Jean Bianga, the chauffeur of the former finance minister.

In December 2015, MINUSCA issued a [human rights report](#) in which it highlighted the arrest and beating of 21 street children by the OCRB. The children were detained for two days, then released.

The OCRB headquarters is in the center of Bangui, near PKo, but it has representatives in police offices in Damala, 92 Lodgements, Ngouciment, PK 13, Bangouma, and Katine Plateau.

Yékoua-Ketté was named director of the OCRB by decree of the transitional president, Catherine Samba-Panza, in February 2015, as the country was emerging from over two years of protracted sectarian [conflict](#). Violence was particularly acute in Bangui, where there was large scale fighting as recently as [November 2015](#). Street crime also increased during the conflict.

Although other allegations of abuses by the anti-crime unit predate Yékoua-Ketté’s appointment as director, Human Rights Watch noted a spate of killings since he took office in early 2015.

During his time as director, Yékoua-Ketté became known as “The Sheriff of Bangui” because of his reputation for killing suspected criminals on the spot and his fondness for wearing a cowboy hat. Yékoua-Ketté is a lieutenant in the national army, but declared himself a colonel and joined the ranks of the Seleka, a mostly-Muslim rebellion that controlled Bangui from March 2013 to January 2014. The Seleka’s rule was marked by serious human rights [abuses](#).

## **Extrajudicial Executions Committed by the OCRB Between April 2015 and March 2016**

### ***Alfred Yawi, killed between April 24 and April 26, 2015***

Alfred Yawi, 35 and the father of four, was detained by Yékoua-Ketté and OCRB officers outside his home near the PK 13 neighborhood in Bangui in the early afternoon of April 24. Yawi did not resist arrest, a witness said. A family member said, “We knew he was taken to the OCRB, but we did not go to find him because going there uninvited to talk with the ‘Sheriff of Bangui’ is difficult and can be dangerous.”

Two days later, family members heard an announcement on the radio that a body had been discovered along the Oubangui River in the 2nd arrondissement. Family members identified the body as Yawi, whose hands were apparently tied behind his back when he was executed. A witness who had seen the police unit detain him said: “He was in the same clothes he had been wearing when he was taken. He was already starting to decompose so we had no choice but to take him to the cemetery.”

### ***Nathan Badi and Saint-Cyr Dezoua, killed July 31, 2015***

Witnesses saw Nathan Badi, 28, and Saint-Cyr Dezoua, 25, running away from an OCRB vehicle in the Miskine neighborhood on July 31, 2015. They were unarmed. “I was in front of a house near the traffic circle when I saw the two young men walking,” a witness said. “I knew Saint-Cyr. A truck from the OCRB stopped as it passed them and the two ran. The vehicle turned around and sped after them. About a minute later I heard shots. The next morning, I was told by people on the streets that Yékoua-Ketté’s men killed two robbers. I knew they must have been talking about Saint-Cyr. I went directly to the morgue and saw the boys. Saint-Cyr had been shot twice in the chest.”

Morgue officials told Human Rights Watch that when the bodies were dropped off, an OCRB officer said that they were robbers. Other sources said that the men had been accused of throwing a grenade during a robbery in the 36 Villas neighborhood, injuring five people.

### ***Emmanuel Régavé and Isaac, killed October 22, 2015***

Emmanuel Régavé, a 23-year-old father of one, was apprehended by police, along with a Congolese national known as Isaac, on October 22, in Ouango neighborhood. The men were accused of robbery and had been identified to the police by local people the night

before. Witnesses said that the police called the OCRB after they arrested Régavé. They said that Yékoua-Ketté arrived with his men and, upon seeing Régavé, announced, “Ah! Now you are going to die!”



The police truck used by the *Office Central de Répression du Banditisme* (OCRB) to round up suspected criminals in Bangui, including several victims whom witnesses told Human Rights Watch were last seen alive in this truck and later found dead along the banks of the Oubangui River.

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Earlier that day the OCRB had detained a suspected accomplice of Régavé, Urie Kolaba. Kolaba, Régavé, and Isaac were held for a short time in front of Régavé’s home before Yékoua-Ketté ordered Kolaba to get into the police truck, which already held a 14-year-old suspected thief, Samson Ndakouzou, witnesses said.

By this point there were over a dozen witnesses at the scene. Witnesses said that Yékoua-Ketté ordered his men to shoot Régavé and Isaac as they stood outside Régavé’s home. Isaac tried to run when he heard the order, but was quickly caught. “One of Yékoua-Ketté’s men shot two bullets in the air to scare us away, then he quickly shot Emmanuel and the Congolese,” a witness said. “Then the OCRB left with the prisoners.” Isaac was not dead,

another witness said: “He was alive, he could ask for water. The OCRB came back about 30 minutes later to finish him off.” The bodies were left on the ground.

***Samson Ndakouzou and Urie Kolaba, killed October 24, 2015***

Samson Ndakouzou, suspected of theft, was arrested by local authorities in the 7th arrondissement on October 22. The same day, he was handed over to the OCRB who detained him in their headquarters for two days.

Urie Kolaba was also arrested on October 22, and taken to OCRB headquarters after Régavé and Isaac were executed. A relative visited and spoke with Kolaba there on October 22 and October 23. He said he pleaded with Yékoua-Ketté for Kolaba’s life, but Yékoua-Ketté told him, “No, he was a thief that was trying to steal with his friend, so we will kill him.” This relative said that Kolaba told him: “They say they are going to kill me; they are not hiding it. I am so afraid.”

Ndakouzou and Kolaba were killed in an area in the 7th arrondissement known as “*Jardin des fleurs*” (flower garden), an unoccupied field near some houses. A witness said that Yékoua-Ketté ordered his men to shoot both in the back: “After they shot Urie they told Samson to turn around. His hands were tied behind him. They shot him in the back and in the throat.” The relative who visited Kolaba in jail saw his body at the morgue: “Urie had been shot three times, in the head, the neck and the back.”

Ndakouzou’s family later retrieved his body at the morgue.

***Romarc Vounbo, killed October 28, 2015***

Romarc Vounbo, 28, was arrested for robbery and detained in the Ngaragba Prison. On September 28, he was one of between 500 and 700 prisoners who escaped in a mass breakout. Passers-by identified him on October 28, as he drank in a bar in La Kouanga. The police were notified and came to arrest him. His friends followed him to the police station in the 2nd arrondissement and saw him put into an OCRB vehicle. He was taken to the periphery of the 7th arrondissement, to the “*Jardin des fleurs*,” where Yékoua-Ketté executed him.

A witness said:

We were hiding in the tall grass. Yékoua-Ketté's men had Romaric sitting on the ground next to the vehicle. We watched Yékoua-Ketté get out of the truck and the guards told [Vounbo] to stand up. He looked like he was in pain but he stood up. They men pushed him forward to Yékoua-Ketté and took his handcuffs off. Then he pushed him down to his knees. Yékoua-Ketté pointed a rifle at him and yelled, 'Is it true? Is it true? Speak now!' Romaric was saying, 'I'm sorry, forgive me!' He had his hands spread out. Yékoua-Ketté fired a shot into his stomach, but Romaric did not fall down. He started to bleed, but he did not fall. Yékoua-Ketté fired a second shot, but he still did not fall. Yékoua-Ketté shook his head and went to his car for his pistol. He came back...and forced his pistol into his mouth and shot him in the head.

A relative of Voubo said: "I saw his body. The back of his head had been blown out. His face was intact, but the skull was empty. He was also shot twice in the chest...How can they arrest someone at 4 p.m. and kill him like this at 5:30 p.m."

***Gervais Magna, killed November 4, 2015***

Gervais Magna, 33 and the father of six, was a leader of an anti-balaka group – largely Christian and animist [militias](#) who fought the Seleka – in Lobaye Province. On November 3, 2015, a 16-year-old girl in his village died and Magna led a group that accused an old woman of using sorcery to cause the girl's death. The group beat the woman to death. The police arrested Magna, who resisted arrest and fought with the police. The police called Yékoua-Ketté. A relative of Magna said: "We knew that they had called the OCRB, but we thought he was going to be taken to Mbaïki [the capital of Lobaye Province]."

Witnesses said Yékoua-Ketté arrived the following afternoon and took Magna. Magna's relatives tried to accompany the OCRB vehicle but Yékoua-Ketté would not permit it. One of his men told the family, "Follow us to Bangui and find him at the OCRB headquarters." The next morning, as the family looked for money to pay for transportation to Bangui, they received a call saying that Magna's body had been found the night before near a forestry plantation along the main road to the capital. "We went to the area and found his body wrapped in a cloth," a relative said. "He had been shot twice, in the head and in the back."



***Jordi Befio, killed between December 5 and December 7, 2015***

Jordi Befio, 19, was arrested on December 5 by the OCRB during a fight at Pétévo market. A witness said that Yékoua-Ketté arrived during the fight and got out of his truck to assess the situation. The witness said that Befio had a knife during the fight, but dropped it immediately on the orders of the OCRB officers. Befio was arrested by Yékoua-Ketté and his men. His family searched for him unsuccessfully at local police stations for two days, and on December 7, found his body along the banks of the Oubangui River in the 2nd arrondissement. A relative said: “I saw his body. He had been shot twice in the side. His abdomen and intestines were coming out. We put the body in a casket and went directly to bury it because he was starting to decompose. He was not a criminal. He just made a bad decision that day in the fight. He did not deserve this.”

***Raymond Gongalut, killed December 24 or 25, 2015***

Raymond Gongalut, about 50 and the father of three, a suspected member of an anti-balaka group, was stopped on his motorcycle on December 24, in the 8th arrondissement by OCRB officers. Witnesses said that Gongalut was armed with a grenade at the time of arrest but that he did not resist and that OCRB officers peacefully disarmed him at the scene.

A relative went to the OCRB headquarters the same day to see him: “When we arrived at the OCRB they confirmed that he was there, but they would not let us see him. The next morning we went there at 6 a.m. Again we asked to see Raymond and the officer said, ‘At 4 a.m. we took him away.’ This made me scared because that means you have to go to the hospital to check for the body. We went to the hospital and found his body in the morgue.” He had been shot four times in the stomach.

***Senele Ombade, killed January 10, 2016***

Yékoua-Ketté and OCRB officers arrested 31-year-old Senele Ombade, a motorcycle taxi driver, on January 10, near the Abed Goumba crossroads in the 5th arrondissement, witnesses said. The reasons for his arrest remain unclear.

A relative of Ombade’s said: “When I heard he was taken by the OCRB I went straight to the headquarters to look for him. He was not there. Then, while I was in town, I heard there were bodies in Ouango [a neighborhood in the 7th Arrondissement]. I went to Ouango and

found his body on the road to Kassai. It had been thrown there and nobody had claimed the body. He had been shot in the head.”

***Cyril Ndourogbo, killed January 14 or 15, 2016***

Yékoua-Ketté arrested Cyril Ndourogbo, a 24-year-old father of two, at a funeral in the UCATEX neighborhood on the evening of January 14. A witness said: “Yékoua-Ketté arrived and pointed his pistol into Cyril’s chest and told him to move. I followed them to the parking and saw Cyril put into the OCRB truck. He was made to lie down in the back. Yékoua-Ketté was driving and his men were behind.” Ndourogbo’s family went to the OCRB headquarters on January 15, but could get no official information about him. However, a prisoner at the OCRB whom they knew from their neighborhood told them, “Cyril was killed yesterday and his body was put into a sack. I had to help throw the sack into the river.”

On January 16, the family went back to the OCRB. Multiple family members said that Yékoua-Ketté became angry with them and told his men to force them out of the compound. Before they left he yelled at them, “I had been searching for him [Ndourogbo]. Once I had him, I killed him. Look for his body in a bag on the Oubangui River.” His body has not been found.

***Rufen Balekouzou, killed between January 17 and January 20, 2016***

On January 16, OCRB officers arrested Rufen Balekouzou, 32 and the father of two, at his job in Kilomètre 5 and took him away in their vehicle. The next day family members visited Balekouzou at the OCRB detention center. “I paid 500 francs (approximately US\$0.85) to speak with Rufen.” a relative said. “We spoke for about an hour. He told me he was accused of being a robber. He said, ‘I am very scared, the conditions are very bad here.’”

When family members went to visit him again on January 20, they were told he had been transferred to Ngaragba Central Prison, but they could not find him there. Later that day, they heard an announcement on the radio about the discovery of a body along the Oubangui River. The body was Balekouzou’s, and he had been shot four times.

***Faustin Ngoudi, killed around January 20, 2016***

Faustin Ngoudi, 26 and the father of one, whom acquaintances described as a known criminal, was shot by the OCRB in Kina around January 20. “It was between 9 and 10 a.m.,” a witness said. “It was after the conflict last October and the neighborhood had been

abandoned. I sometimes went back there to sell bread and see what was happening. At this time, it was rare to see a vehicle passing. So when the OCRB truck went by with officers in the back, I noticed it. Just after it passed I heard eight or nine shots near the Kokoro Market...Then people ran from that direction saying men had just been killed there. I ran and saw that Faustin had been shot dead.”

Another witness saw an OCRB vehicle dump Ngoudi’s body near the Fatima Church later that day. Ngoudi had been shot four times in the stomach.

***Jean-Noël Bebona, killed January 27, 2016***

Jean-Noël Bebona, 33 and the father of three, a former anti-balaka fighter, was apprehended and killed by the OCRB while selling goods near the Poumale market, outside the 7th arrondissement. Witnesses said he begged for his life before he was shot. A relative said: “When we arrived at the morgue a guard came and asked what we wanted and I said, ‘We are looking for a body brought here by the OCRB.’ He said, ‘Yes, they dumped a body here.’ I saw his body, he was shot in the head and in the back.”

***Romarc Yakoro, killed February 13, 2016***

Romarc Yakoro, 19, alias “Likolo,” was arrested for theft the night of February 12, by soldiers in Yassi-Mandji neighborhood. On February 13, he was transferred to the OCRB office in Ngouciment. Yékoua-Ketté took him away a short while later. A motorcycle taxi driver who knew Yakoro said:

It was around 11a.m. I was transporting a client into town near the Hotel Oubangui. I had stopped to get fuel when I saw the OCRB truck speed by. As it passed I saw Likolo in the back. He was with two OCRB officers. Yékoua-Ketté was driving. I knew that Yékoua-Ketté killed criminals in town and I knew that Likolo was in danger. So I abandoned my client and I followed the OCRB vehicle into the 7th arrondissement. We went toward Ouango. I was just behind them and I saw Likolo in the back with the two police. I thought that they were going to take Likolo to Ngaragba [Central Prison], but they did not, they went past the prison. So I stopped and waited for them to return.

About 30-40 minutes later the vehicle came back with its lights on. The tailgate was opened and there were two feet sticking out. The feet flopped to the side. I went to Yassi-Mandji and told people that I had seen Likolo taken by the OCRB and it looked like he had been killed. People told me that he had been taken by the military to the OCRB base earlier and that Yékoua-Ketté took him, so we knew he was dead.

Relatives eventually found Yakoro's body in the morgue. Yakoro had been shot twice in the abdomen.

***Hervé Zangouli, killed March 4 or 5, 2016***

Hervé Zoungouli was arrested by the OCRB on March 4, while smoking marijuana along the Oubangui River near PK 0, according to witnesses. The last time he was seen alive was in the back of an OCRB truck. His body was discovered early the next morning along the banks of the Oubangui River. A family member told Human Rights Watch that Zangouli had been shot in the chest.

**Payment for Release From the OCRB**

Human Rights Watch documented two cases in which Yékoua-Ketté personally held prisoners for ransom, demanding payment from their families.

The police unit held an 18-year-old woman for approximately six weeks, from October 22 to early December 2015. She said that Yékoua-Ketté repeatedly threatened her life and that she had a miscarriage in the OCRB jail: "I had to stay two days in my own blood before they allowed my family to give me soap to clean myself." Yékoua-Ketté demanded 100,000 francs (approximately US\$170) from the family, but they were able to negotiate a lower price. The woman was never charged with a crime.

On April 28, 2016, Yékoua-Ketté and his men arrested a 25-year-old former anti-balaka fighter along the Oubangui River. The man was accused of having committed an act of armed robbery earlier in the year. Yékoua-Ketté ordered his men to beat the man in public and took him to the OCRB headquarters. Yékoua-Ketté then asked the family to pay 100,000 francs (approximately US\$170) for the former anti-balaka fighter's release. Over the course of 10 days, the family was able to negotiate a lower price and their relative was released without charge.

# Central African Republic: Raped and Abandoned as War Rages

Author: Hillary Margolis, Women's Rights researcher, Human Rights Watch

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/19/central-african-republic-raped-and-abandoned-war-rages>

June 19, 2016 – Commentary published in *Newsweek Europe*



A sign emphasizing the importance of healthcare and protection for survivors of sexual violence at a hospital in Kaga Bandoro, Central African Republic. © 2016 Human Rights Watch

The attack started while she was drawing water for her family. “Sophie,” then 20 years old, was returning to her home in Bambari, in [Central African Republic](#) (CAR), when she heard that the [Seleka](#), mostly Muslim fighters who had ousted the previous government, had burned down her family’s house. Sophie fled into the bush with four other young women.

When they ran into a group of Seleka, she remembered, the men “started clapping their hands, showing joy.” They took Sophie and the others to a makeshift base in the bush,

where they raped them repeatedly and forced them to do domestic chores. “Sometimes we prepared food, or did laundry,” she told me when I met her in May. “Sometimes when you were cooking, they would come and three of them would rape you. They did that three or four times a day—several men, different men.”

After three days, the young women escaped, but their ordeal did not end. As in other conflicts, survivors of rape in CAR, may face psychological trauma, life-altering illness or injury, and stigma or even rejection by family and community members. For Sophie, the result was pregnancy.

While recent news from CAR may make it seem like [peacekeepers](#) are the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse, far more women and girls suffer sexual violence at the hands of armed groups. In 2015, the U.N. declared June 19 the first International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict with the hope of shining a light on the needs of victims, and ensuring their rights to justice and services.

More than a year after the rapes, Sophie—and many of the other women and girls we interviewed in CAR—had not been able to get much-needed health care. The women were hiding in a village when Sophie realized she was pregnant. She told me she would have had an abortion if that were an option, but the clinic in the village was closed. The health care workers had fled the fighting.

She eventually reached a village with a functioning health center, but she gave birth on her own because she couldn’t afford to pay for health care. Even where free health care is available, many of the women and girls we met didn’t know about the services, or couldn’t afford the transportation to reach them.

Some told us they didn’t seek care, fearing shame and stigma if people knew they had been raped. Women told us of being mocked or shunned, and even abandoned by husbands and family members.

Some women we talked with expressed a clear desire for accountability. Marie was raped by [two Seleka in her neighborhood in Bangui](#), the capital, in 2013. “I have thought about justice,” she said. “I have thought about all these things that the Seleka have done: they



pillaged houses, raped women, and killed people. I ask if justice is going to be done to them, and to repay people like me who have suffered.”

As with other countries where rape is widespread during conflict, CAR urgently needs to address the needs of rape victims. Survivors need health services, and community education is essential to counter stigma and build support networks for survivors. And as Marie said, they need justice. A [Special Criminal Court](#) for CAR could be instrumental in prosecuting sexual violence. But it will need to offer adequate psychological support for victims and protection for victims, witnesses, lawyers, and judges if victims are to come forward. The U.N., other international agencies and donors will need to help.

The U.N. special representative of the secretary-general on sexual violence in conflict, Zainab Bangura, [said](#) that June 19 would mark an annual “global call to action for security, justice, and service sectors on behalf of survivors of sexual violence in conflict all over the world.” The United Nations General Assembly’s establishment of this international day is one of a [number of policies and promises](#) governments and the U.N. have made over the years to protect women and girls from sexual violence during war, ensure care for survivors, and hold rapists to account.

But women and girls in conflict are still waiting to see the impact of these commitments. In the meantime, women and girls in CAR remain at risk every day, when they [go to market or to the fields](#), simply to feed and support their families. Setting aside June 19 as a special day will help draw attention to their needs. But many, like Sophie—who wonders how she will provide for her daughter, and how she will someday explain who her father is—have to rebuild their lives, both in CAR and in other countries around the world. They will need services and support every day of the year.

# Holding Abusive UN Peacekeepers to Account

*Author: Annerieke Smaak, Women's Rights senior associate, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/08/holding-abusive-un-peacekeepers-account-o>

## June 8, 2016 – Dispatch

Despite their mandate to maintain peace and protect people in war-torn countries, some UN peacekeepers have themselves been abusers. Highly publicized allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic have brought new attention to longtime concerns over peacekeepers violating the rights of those they are meant to protect.

Now, the first-ever UN resolution on sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers offers an additional tool to hold abusive peacekeepers to account, as well as hope that survivors of such abuse will receive the support they need.

On March 11, the UN Security Council adopted its [resolution on sexual abuse and exploitation](#), designed to prevent sexual violence by UN peacekeepers. In addition to language on holding alleged perpetrators accountable, resolution 2272 also calls for medical and psychological assistance for survivors of sexual violence. In the days leading up to the negotiations, Human Rights Watch [pushed](#) to ensure the resolution called for comprehensive support for sexual violence survivors and urged the UN to prioritize their security and well-being.

Despite the UN's decade-old "zero tolerance" policy on abuse by peacekeepers, Human Rights Watch recently [documented cases of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers](#) in the Central African Republic. We found that limited resources and the absence of a clear, coordinated response among UN agencies led to delays not in only reporting abuse, but also in ensuring that survivors access critical services. The lack of support to survivors was also highlighted in [a 2015 report from the Office of Internal Oversight Services](#), the UN's internal watchdog, which found that very few victims of sexual exploitation and abuse "have been assisted due to lack of dedicated funding and the slow enforcement process."

As UN Security Council members began negotiations on a new resolution, Human Rights Watch urged that perpetrators be brought to justice and victims be supported. We provided analysis of the new Secretary-General's report on peacekeeper abuse, as well as concrete recommendations to ensure that UN agencies [put survivors first](#) in their response, namely by maintaining confidentiality, minimizing the risk of repeated trauma from multiple interviews, and ensuring prompt access to medical and psychosocial care – all missing from previous policies.

The final resolution adopted by the UN Security Council included our recommendations for survivors almost verbatim, thus providing an additional accountability avenue for survivors and those who advocate for their rights.

There is much left to be done to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers and other UN personnel. Ensuring survivors receive the protection and services they deserve is essential, and the inclusion of support to survivors in resolution 2272 is a step in the right direction.

# Central African Republic: Murder by Peacekeepers

*Discovery of Mass Grave Provides New Evidence*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/06/07/central-african-republic-murder-peacekeepers>

**June 7, 2016 – Press release**



Twelve skulls discovered in a mass grave in February 2016 near a peacekeeping base in Boali, Central African Republic. The victims are believed to be individuals who were summarily executed by Republic of Congo peacekeepers on March 24, 2014. © 2016 Private

(Nairobi) – Soldiers from the [Republic of Congo](#) killed at least 18 people, including women and children, between December 2013 and June 2015 while serving as peacekeepers in the [Central African Republic](#). Two years after Human Rights Watch first reported on enforced disappearances by peacekeepers from the Republic of Congo, their government has taken no action toward credible investigations or justice for these crimes.

A grave found near a peacekeeping base in Boali, and exhumed on February 16, 2016, uncovered the remains of 12 people identified as having been detained by the peacekeepers in March 2014. The exhumation of the bodies refutes the peacekeepers'

previous claim that the victims had escaped. Human Rights Watch also documented the death by torture of two anti-balaka leaders in Bossangoa in December 2013, the public execution of two suspected anti-balaka in Mambéré in February 2014, and the beating to death of two civilians in Mambéré in June 2015 by Congolese peacekeepers.

“The discovery of 12 bodies is damning evidence of an appalling crime by Congolese peacekeepers, who had been sent to protect people, not prey on them,” said [Lewis Mudge](#), Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Republic of Congo authorities shouldn’t turn a blind eye to the mounting evidence that their soldiers committed murder in Boali and elsewhere.”

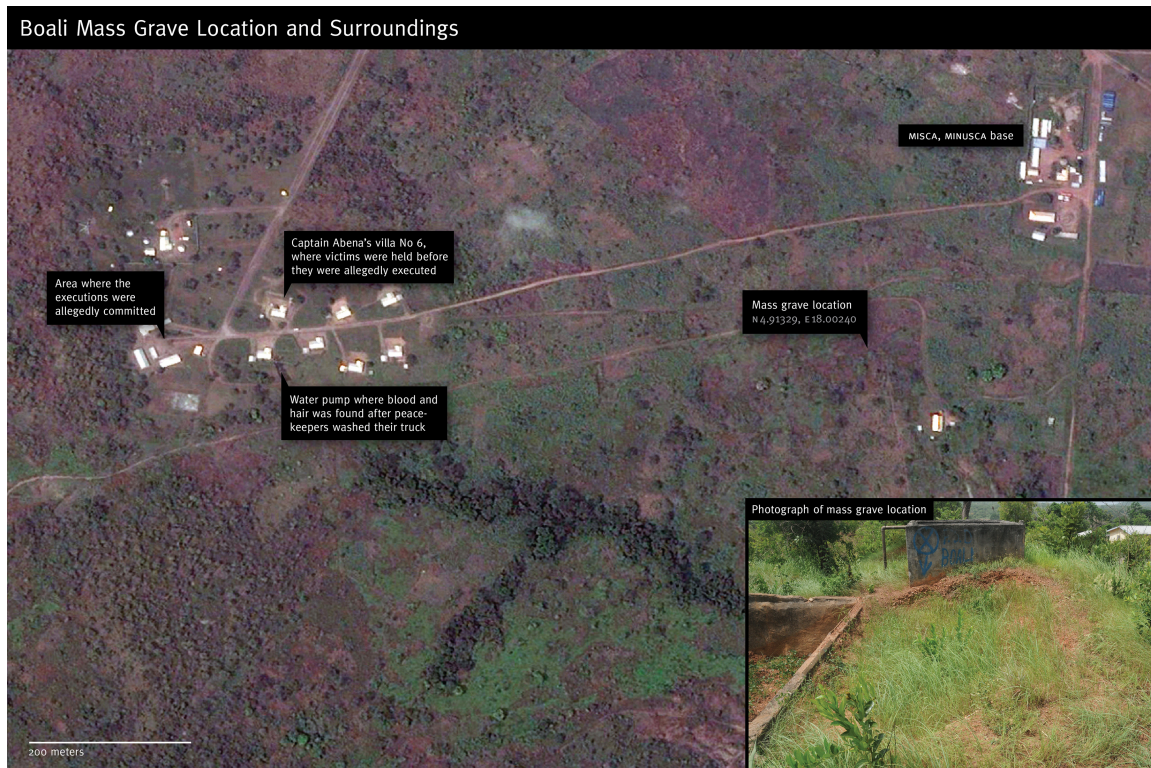
These crimes took place while the peacekeepers served in the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission, known as MISCA, and in the United Nations peacekeeping mission, known as MINUSCA.

Following the exhumation of the grave, Human Rights Watch wrote to President [Denis Sassou Nguesso](#) of the Republic of Congo and to the [AU](#) urging credible investigations to bring those responsible to justice.

A local non-governmental organization exhumed the mass grave on the grounds of ENERCA, a hydro-electric company, whose compound in Boali has been used as a peacekeeping base since 2013. The bodies were badly decomposed, but their clothing and other distinctive items identified the victims as members of a group of at least 12 people the Congolese peacekeepers arrested on March 24, 2014. Those arrested had subsequently disappeared.

Human Rights Watch investigated the disappearances in Boali in May 2014, July 2014, March 2015, and April 2016. Following the March 2015 visit to Boali, Human Rights Watch informed both UN and government authorities of the presumed location of the grave, which was about 500 meters from a MINUSCA peacekeeping base, as can be seen in [satellite imagery](#). Yet AU peacekeepers, UN peacekeepers, and national authorities made no effort to protect the site, or to conduct a forensic exhumation to preserve evidence for future judicial proceedings.





Satellite imagery © 2016 John Emerson for Human Rights Watch

The victims were arrested following a violent incident between Congolese peacekeepers and a local anti-balaka leader, the self-styled “General” Maurice Konoumo, in which one peacekeeper died. Angered by the death of their colleague, the Congolese peacekeepers surrounded the anti-balaka leader’s house, arrested him and at least 12 others, including five women, one of whom was six months pregnant, and two children, one about 10 years old and the other 7 months old.

Witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the detainees were taken to the peacekeeping base at about 7 p.m. and confined in villa number 6, used by a commander identified by witnesses as Captain Abena.

The peacekeepers ordered civilians who lived at or near the base to go inside their homes. One witness said: “They came and yelled at us, ‘Go into your homes and lock the doors! Do not come out!’ They were very angry. It was the first and only time they had made us lock ourselves into our homes like that, it was not normal.”



Later that night, witnesses heard screams and a volley of gunshots from an area near the villa on the other side of the road, followed about an hour later by another round of gunfire from the same location. One witness said he overheard a heated debate among the Congolese peacekeepers between the two rounds of shooting about whether to kill the women and children, followed by the second round of gunfire.



*Above:* A skull of a victim found in a mass grave near a peacekeeping base in Boali, Central African Republic. The victim is believed to be an individual who was summarily executed by Republic of Congo peacekeepers on March 24, 2014. © 2016 Private

The following day, witnesses saw traces of blood at various locations at the base, including at the water pump where Congolese peacekeepers cleaned their vehicles. Peacekeepers declared an area known as *Usine Boali 3*, about 500 meters from the villa, off-limits, ordering residents not to cultivate there or cut the grass, under the pretense that the area had been mined. Residents said they believed this was where the peacekeepers had buried the victims.

On June 2, 2014, Human Rights Watch [published](#) information about the enforced disappearance of at least 11 victims in Boali and the torturing death of two people by Congolese peacekeepers in Bossangoa in December 2013, calling for action by AU authorities under whose auspices the peacekeeping mission was

deployed. The following month, the MISCA force commander temporarily suspended the commanding officers from Boali and Bossangoa, Captain Abena and Captain Mokongo, and men under their command were redeployed to other parts of the country.

Under the status of mission agreement between the Central African government and the AU, troop-contributing countries are responsible for holding to account members of their forces for any crimes committed in the Central African Republic.

On July 4, 2014, Human Rights Watch wrote to the foreign minister of the Republic of Congo informing him of the findings and to El Ghassim Wane, then the AU Peace and Security Department director, urging investigations and accountability for the crimes. There was no response.

In September 2014, when the United Nations took over peacekeeping responsibility from the AU, UN officials insisted that all existing Congolese peacekeepers be rotated out of the Central African Republic and replaced with new soldiers to ensure that none of those responsible for the abuses became part of the UN mission.

In March 2015, UN human rights investigators investigated the crimes committed by peacekeepers in Boali and in Bossangoa. On June 5, 2015, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights released a [statement](#) confirming the Human Rights Watch findings and said that “MISCA’s Congolese contingent has committed acts of enforced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial killings.” The UN sent a number of diplomatic communications to the Congolese government in Brazzaville urging judicial investigations into the serious allegations. Little or no action was taken either by the AU or the Congolese government.

MINUSCA’s mandate includes providing support to the national police and judicial institutions. While prosecutorial jurisdiction for crimes committed by the peacekeepers lies with the Republic of Congo, in the absence of any action by Congolese judicial authorities, national authorities in the Central African Republic with support from the United Nations should begin their own investigations to seek accountability for the crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

On February 4, 2016, Human Rights Watch also [published](#) a report on sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls by Republic of Congo peacekeepers, among others, in Bambari from mid-September to mid-December 2015.

The AU, the UN, and judicial authorities in both Congo and the Central African Republic should work together to ensure there is full accountability for these crimes and to prevent such crimes from happening again, Human Rights Watch said.

“Simply rotating troops out of the Central African Republic with no further consequences sends the message that peacekeepers can get away with murder,” Mudge said. “No peacekeeper should be above the law.”

#### **Summary Executions in Boali by MISCA – 2014**

On March 24, 2014, Congolese peacekeepers went to investigate shots they heard coming from the home of an anti-balaka leader known as “General” Maurice Konoumo. (In June 2014, Human Rights Watch erroneously reported Konoumo’s name as Mokono). When the peacekeepers tried to confiscate the weapon, Konoumo, who was drunk, refused to hand it over and a violent argument broke out. A respected local Catholic priest intervened to help calm the situation.

Shortly afterward, a group of anti-balaka fighters attacked a MISCA vehicle near Boali’s central market, throwing a grenade and opening fire with automatic weapons. The attack killed one Congolese peacekeeper and wounded four others.

Following the ambush, a group of approximately 20 MISCA soldiers surrounded Konoumo’s compound and rounded up 13 people they found at the house: Konoumo; his pregnant 21-year-old wife, Laurene Mombassa; his 18-year-old son, Grace-a-Dieu Konoumo; his son’s wife, Ingrid Konoumo, a 16-year-old Muslim survivor of an anti-balaka massacre whom Konoumo had forced into marriage with his son; his brother, Antoine Konoumo; an anti-balaka fighter, Richard Selebangué; his 20-year old wife, Marie-Sandrine Selebangué; Jaline, a 17-year-old female anti-balaka fighter; Gbaguene, an anti-balaka fighter; a friend from Bobissa, Jean Bruno Wilita; Wilita’s wife, Marie Wilita, with her 7-month-old baby; and Derek Yawete, a 10-year-old boy visiting from Bogangolo.

The Congolese peacekeepers took the detainees to their base at ENERCA and held them at Captain Abena’s villa. The peacekeepers ordered all civilians who lived at or near the base to go inside their homes.

A witness said:

I argued with the MISCA and I said, “How can you tell me to go to my house?” But a friend said, “No, this seems serious, do not argue about this.” I saw a vehicle go down into the camp with people in it. I could not see who it was,

but the people were civilians. They were not MISCA soldiers. We stayed inside for a few hours, then around 11 p.m. we heard many shots and screams coming from near the Captain's villa. An hour later I heard another volley of shots. We heard the discussion between the volleys as to whether to kill the women and children. Around 1 a.m. I saw their vehicles driving through the camp.

After the execution, the Congolese peacekeepers cleaned their truck with water from a pump near their villas, said witnesses Human Rights Watch interviewed in June 2015. "The next morning there was blood everywhere around the pump," one witness said. Another witness said: "Even today there is still human hair near the pump."

On June 3, 2014, after Human Rights Watch published its [report](#) on the disappearances, the AU issued a [news release](#) saying it had opened an investigation into the allegations and based on its findings would "take the required action in accordance with the rules governing the functioning of MISCA." No information about this investigation has ever been made public. In March 2015, AU officials told Human Rights Watch that a report had been drafted, but they were not at liberty to disclose its contents or conclusions. When UN human rights investigators in March 2015 investigated the crimes committed by peacekeepers in Boali and in Bossangoa, they confirmed that MISCA's Congolese contingent had committed enforced disappearance, torture and extrajudicial killings.

### **Discovery of the Grave**

The local non-governmental organization exhumed the grave on February 16, 2016 in the exact location indicated by the accounts given to Human Rights Watch. Local residents informed the organization, whose responsibilities include removing corpses from wells and other water sources, about the mass grave, and the group received permission for the exhumation from local authorities. The exhumation took place in the presence of local authorities, including a representative of the national police, who described the exhumation in his police report as one of "anti-balaka [who] were kidnapped by MISCA, killed and buried here." No forensic experts were present.

The exhumation revealed 12 skulls, clothes that matched the individuals who had been reported missing in 2014, and a number of anti-balaka amulets that had been worn by the general and his fighters. Those present at the exhumation said they did not believe the



baby's skull was found, although one of the skulls, significantly smaller than the rest, was thought to be that of a 10-year-old boy.

An individual who took part in the exhumation told Human Rights Watch: “The bodies were buried on top of each other, almost in layers. I think they had been killed first before they were put into the grave because they had just been thrown one on top of the other.”

Another said: “We first found *gris-gris* (traditional amulets associated with the anti-balaka), then some clothes, and then the bodies.” One person who took part in the exhumation, a former anti-balaka fighter from Boali, recognized Maurice Konomou's jacket.

After the exhumation, the bodies were moved to new graves approximately two kilometers outside of Boali in an isolated location.



New graves dug on the outskirts of Boali, Central African Republic, for the remains of at least 12 people murdered by Republic of Congo peacekeepers on March 24, 2014. The victims' remains were uncovered in a mass grave near the peacekeeping base in February 2016. © 2016 Lewis Mudge/Human Rights Watch

In April 2016 one of Konomou's relatives told Human Rights Watch:

We have not forgotten what has happened. We want the MISCA soldiers to face justice. The people who are dead could have helped their families had they not been killed. We want a real investigation done, we are not satisfied with the investigation thus far. It is like the Central African Republic is nothing to the African Union. I sometimes think, "What if justice could be done? What would it look like if a real investigation was done?"

### **Torture and Killings in Bossangoa by MISCA – 2013**

On December 22, 2013, Congolese peacekeepers tortured to death two anti-balaka leaders in Bossangoa following the brutal lynching of a Congolese peacekeeper the same day. The incident, was first reported on by Human Rights Watch in June 2014, although it was witnessed by many local UN staff members and aid workers who were staying at the MISCA base at the time for their safety. Locked in a staff room during the incident, the UN staff and aid workers overheard the Congolese peacekeepers torturing the two men throughout the night. Their mutilated bodies were found the next day and seen by many witnesses who confirmed that the two men suffered extensive burns and saw evidence that burning melting plastic had been dripped on their bodies.

### **Executions in Mambéré by MISCA – 2014**

On February 26, 2014, Congolese peacekeepers in Mambéré killed two anti-balaka fighters known as "Palasie" and "Court Pied," at the town's main crossroads in front of a large crowd of onlookers. Witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch April 2016 said that Congolese peacekeepers told them the two men had been captured the day before in the village of Bambio.

One witness who watched the executions said:

I saw two men with their hands tied behind their backs. There was a large group of people watching, maybe 200. All of the people were curious to see them. They forced the men to lay down on the ground. The MISCA commander took one of his soldier's guns and he killed them... We were all shocked by what we saw. I had never seen someone killed like that.



Another witness said the peacekeepers encouraged people to watch the public execution yelling, “These are anti-balaka, we will kill them.” The witness said, that when a crowd had gathered, “the peacekeepers forced the two men out of their truck, made them lie down on the ground, and then shot them in the head and chest.” After the execution, the peacekeepers forced local residents to bury the bodies saying “If you do not bury these bodies right now we will kill three times as many people.” The residents buried the bodies in the cemetery behind the gendarmerie.

### **Excessive Use of Force and Killings in Mambéré by MINUSCA – 2015**

On June 10, 2015, UN Congolese peacekeepers based in Mambéré detained and beat four men, two of whom later died from their injuries.

Based on Human Rights Watch research conducted in April 2016, peacekeepers detained the men because of a dispute about a woman between a peacekeeper and one of the victims. Human Rights Watch found no information to corroborate that the men had been involved in criminal activities, as MINUSCA alleged in a [news release](#) on June 10.

Three of the men – Alban Nambokinena, Kouvo Befio, and Douala Bakiko were neighbors. Witnesses said they were taken from their homes in the early hours of June 10 and severely beaten as they were arrested. Nambokinena said:

I heard a knock on my door around 4 a.m. and I opened it. There were the MINUSCA in military uniforms with their blue helmets.

At first I thought that maybe this was for some work so I went outside, but the MINUSCA grabbed me and started to beat me there in front of my house. At the same time, they pulled my neighbor Kouvo out of his house and started beating him too. They were kicking and beating us with their rifles. I knew that I had not done anything so I was yelling, “What did I do?” They were just beating me and speaking to each other in their own language.

Another witness, a friend of the arrested men, said: “When I saw the men put into the truck I tried to follow, but the MINUSCA pointed their guns at me and said, ‘If you follow us we will kill you.’ I just went into my house and cried.”

Together with a fourth person, Bernard Lamaye, the men were taken to the Congolese MINUSCA base at an area called “*scierie*” – a timber processing center – where the beatings continued for hours.

Nambokinena said:

When we arrived at the *scierie*, they really started to beat us seriously there out in the open. They did something they called “operation helicopter.” It was like this: four men would each grab a hand or leg. Then they threw us up as high as they could. We came down and landed on planks, they would kick us as we fell.

They were trying to break our bodies. I did not really hear what they were saying because the Congolese were speaking between themselves. They weren’t asking questions. They did not interrogate us or tell us to admit to something, they just beat us. They gave me the “operation helicopter” four times. I can’t tell you how it hurt my neck, back, and head.

After some time I did not feel any pain though. I thought my back was going to break in two, I really thought that was happening.

Finally, when I could not feel anything, the commander said, “Ok, that is enough put them in the container.” This was maybe around 6 a.m. because the sun was coming up. The men were locked in an old shipping container. Within hours one of the men, Douala, died from his injuries. Another, Befio, fell into a comma. Nambokinena said:

We started to cry. We called for the MINUSCA. A guard yelled, “Stop it! Don’t cry!” We said, “No, one of ours is dead!” The guard said, “If we open the door and we see someone is not dead, you will suffer.” But they opened the door and a MINUSCA soldier came in. He saw that Douala was dead. He saw straight away.

On learning about the death, the peacekeepers took the remaining three men to the hospital in Berberati, 125 kilometers from Mambéré. Witnesses said they saw the men being carried to the MINUSCA truck. One witness said, “It was clear they could not walk.”

The peacekeepers told hospital staff the men were thieves. Hospital staff and local officials said they recognized the men, knew them to be from Mambéré and did not believe they were criminals. Medical staff members said that Befio was in a coma when he arrived at the hospital. He died on June 14, 2015.

The day after Befio's death, MINUSCA flew the two survivors to Bangui, the capital and took them by MINUSCA ambulance to a local hospital. Local authorities gave each one 50,000 francs (approximately US\$85).

Under normal procedures, suspected criminals are transferred to Bangui by MINUSCA's police force, UNPOL, at the request of national or local prosecutors and handed over to national authorities. In this case, the national prosecutor told Human Rights Watch he was not aware of any request from his office to transport the two survivors to Bangui. Once they recuperated, the men left the hospital. They were not charged or given any other assistance. "We were quickly forgotten," one said. After a month in Bangui, the men ran out of funds and hitchhiked back to Mambéré.

Nambokinena said:

If I am accused of a crime let them come arrest me. It is the MINUSCA who committed a crime. I have not recovered from this. I have pain in my neck, back, and hips. I have tried to work, but it has been difficult because my job is to move heavy wood onto trucks. I now need to ask someone to take my place because my job was so physical and you need to be strong. I don't have the money to see a doctor. When I make a little money I get a doctor to give me medicine which will give me the strength to move around. It is difficult to move around too much and I now get bad headaches.

I think about what happened to me a lot. I am traumatized. When I see the Congolese in town I remember what happened. The population is still scared of the Congolese because of this.

I have two children and my life has changed for the worse. I can't feed my kids like before. I don't have the strength to work as I did. I now make less than half of what I used to make because my health has been affected. For

all my troubles I was only given that 50,000 francs and I used it all in Bangui on medicine.

Twenty Congolese peacekeepers from the unit in Mambéré were repatriated after these killings. Human Rights Watch is not aware that any soldier has been held to account for the killings and serious beatings.

MINUSCA investigated the incident in 2015 and sent the results to the government of the Republic of Congo via a diplomatic note. To the best of Human Rights Watch's knowledge there has been no response.

In April 2016 MINUSCA opened an internal investigation, known as a Board of Inquiry, into the incident. The Board of Inquiry will report on the internal procedures of MINUSCA and how the mission reacted.

# No More Excuses: The Need for an Inclusive Humanitarian Response

*Author: Peter Bouckaert, Emergencies Director, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/24/no-more-excuses-need-inclusive-humanitarian-response>

**May 24, 2016 – Dispatch**



Ambroise, a 27-year-old man with a physical disability, in the M’Poko camp in Bangui, Central African Republic. His parents abandoned him when Seleka forces attacked their neighborhood. He had to be carried 2-3 kilometres to the M’Poko internally displaced camp near the airport by a little boy.

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Participants in this week’s [5/23-24] [World Humanitarian Summit](#) in Istanbul, with its lofty call to “leave no one behind,” should consider the story of Hamamatou from the [Central African Republic](#).

When anti-balaka rebels [attacked](#) Hamamatou's village of Guen in early 2014, the 13-year-old had no way to run. A bout with polio had left her with a serious disability. Her brother tried to carry her to safety on his back, but soon was too exhausted to continue. "I told him, 'Souleymane, put me down and save yourself'," she told me. "He said he would come back for me if they didn't kill him."

Souleymane never returned, and Hamamatou spent two weeks abandoned by the river. Then the anti-balaka fighters found her. Seeing she could not walk without assistance, the fighters decided to kill her. "They said, 'We have found an animal, let's finish it off'," Hamamatou recalled. A female fighter intervened to save her life.

War is difficult for everyone, but one of the often untold stories of many conflicts is the profound isolation, abandonment, and neglect faced by people with disabilities in conflicts around the world.

Throughout our [work](#) on the Central African Republic, Human Rights Watch has repeatedly met people with disabilities who had been left behind when their communities were attacked. We learned of many cases in which the Seleka and anti-balaka rebels showed no mercy to those abandoned, killing them on the spot. At times, the killers showed extreme cruelty toward people with disabilities: one young pregnant woman with a disability was tied up and thrown alive on a fire by the Seleka fighters, and suffered a horrible death.

But the abandonment and neglect we found wasn't only in the heat of battles, when people focused on saving themselves. Even in [camps](#) set up for displaced persons, the basic needs of people with disabilities often go ignored. The camps often have no toilets and sanitary facilities accessible to people with disabilities. Open sewage drains and open fires pose a constant danger to people who are blind or have low vision. Food distribution neglects the needs of people with disabilities, so they often get less -- or nothing at all.

For many people with disabilities, the profound feelings of isolation and neglect they experience in camps are often more upsetting than the abandonment they faced during the fighting. Hamamatou, the young polio survivor, told me that she had never felt as lonely in her life as she did when she finally reached a camp, even though she had never lived so close to hundreds of people. No one ever brought her food, or even a bucket of water to wash herself. Aimé, a blind musician living in the Mpoko camp in the capital, Bangui, told me, "Sometimes I get so angry and discouraged by the difficulties of living here that I just stay inside for the whole day."





Hamamatou, a 13-year-old girl polio survivor, was abandoned by her family after their village was attacked by anti-balaka forces in Central African Republic. Her brother attempted to carry her to safety, but grew exhausted, and had to leave her under a tree. When anti-balaka fighters found her two weeks later, Hamamatou described what happened: “The fighters said, ‘we have found an animal. Let’s finish it off.’” Another anti-balaka soldier intervened to save her life. Hamamatou was rescued and taken to a Catholic mission where she now lives under the care of local priests.

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Much of this suffering takes place not because the humanitarian community lacks the resources to meet the needs of people with disabilities, but because the humanitarian community remains mostly unaware or insensitive to the plight of people with disabilities in conflict. As one senior UN official admitted to Human Rights Watch: “We don’t pay enough attention to the issue of disability. We should be doing more. There is no place for discrimination in humanitarian action.”

A first step toward addressing the needs of people with disabilities would be to include them in the humanitarian response: no one knows the needs of people with disabilities better, and they know how those needs can be met. Many of these needs can be satisfied with simple modifications and a more inclusive planning process.

At the World Humanitarian Summit, governments have taken a key step by endorsing the new [Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action](#). The charter

commits governments to ensure that their humanitarian response plans and programs reflect the various needs and capacities of women, girls, men and boys with disabilities by the end of 2020.

One final, perhaps most important, lesson we learned from people with disabilities during our work in the Central African Republic is that they are often an amazing source of strength and resilience during times of conflict. Perhaps the only community that stayed truly united during the bloody sectarian conflict in the Central African Republic was people with disabilities. They never broke down along sectarian lines, and continued to look after each other with courage and care. In Mpoko camp, people with disabilities organized one of the most popular bands in town, with inspiring songs about ending war and reconciling the nation. That strength and resilience is something from which we all can learn.

## Central African Republic: Hollande Should Use Visit to Rebuild Trust and Pursue Justice - For All

*Authors: Lewis Mudge, Africa researcher, and Bénédicte Jeannerod, France director, Human Rights Watch*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/13/central-african-republic-hollande-should-use-visit-rebuild-trust-and-pursue-justice>

**May 13, 2016 – Commentary published in *Le Monde***

French President Francois Hollande will visit Bangui, the capital of [Central African Republic](#) today, his first visit since the nation's new president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, [took over](#) from a transitional government on March 30, 2016. His visit comes as France is in the midst of drawing down its peacekeeping force, known as Sangaris.

The Central African Republic has been in crisis since late 2012, when the mostly Muslim Seleka rebels ousted the government in a coup and committed widespread [abuses](#). In mid-2013 antibalaka militia carried out large scale reprisal [attacks](#) against Muslim civilians in Bangui and western parts of the country. The result of this violence was thousands dead and almost a million people, many of them from the minority Muslim population, forced to flee their homes.

France, the former colonial power, has maintained a military presence in the country since the start of this most recent crisis and President Hollande's visit is billed as an opportunity to support the peace and stabilization efforts of the new government. To support these efforts, he should publically and privately highlight three critical points: impunity, refugee return and peacekeeper abuses.

An important contributing factor to the violence is that almost none of those responsible for terrible human rights abuses have been held accountable. A step in tackling this impunity was taken by the transitional government when it created a [Special Criminal Court](#). This court, established within the national justice system to complement ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court, will consist of national and international

staff and will investigate and prosecute serious crimes committed since 2003. Making this court a reality will require financial support and technical expertise. It is therefore crucial that President Hollande announce that France recognizes this court as the country's best chance to end impunity, and pledge concrete support.

Almost half a million people, the majority Muslim, remain [refugees](#) outside of the country, while another 420,000 are displaced internally, including some 36,000 Muslims living in [enclaves](#). President Hollande should use his visit to emphasize that the Central African Republic will never be stable while a critical part of its population – Muslims – do not feel secure to return home. Returns of refugees and displaced will not be easy in what remains a country deeply divided on sectarian lines. In order to achieve this the new government will need international cooperation, including from France, to reduce tensions, protect civilians from further attacks and disarm rebel and militia groups. The Sangaris' drawdown should allow some flexibility to continue to support the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country and France should remain ready to increase troop numbers if needed.

Last year allegations [emerged](#) accusing French peacekeepers of raping children and demanding sex in exchange for food at a displacement camp in Bangui. If found to be true and left unresolved, these despicable crimes threaten to undermine the country's fragile peace. President Hollande should declare that no international peacekeeper is above the law and that France will do what it takes to ensure those responsible are held to account. He should also provide details about the progress on French investigations into the abuses committed by French troops.

We have seen how French Sangaris troops helped save lives and provided stability, particularly last [September](#) when Bangui erupted in violence. While there is naturally mistrust of France following the allegations of sexual abuse, it should remain a close partner to the new Central African government. By advocating for accountability, both of rebels and its own Sangaris troops, and supporting the return of refugees and displaced, France can take the international lead in supporting the new government on a path towards stability and justice.



# Central African Republic: Make Justice a Priority

*Joint Civil Society Appeal to the New President*

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/21/central-african-republic-make-justice-priority>

**April 21, 2016 – Press release**



Jean Baptiste Nguondija, a resident of Ngbada, by the grave of his 10 year-old daughter Nathana Poura. Nguondija has lost 5 children since the conflict began in 2013. ©2015 Lewis Mudge/Human Rights Watch

(Bangui) – The undersigned 21 international and Central African human rights organizations call on the new President, Faustin-Archange Touadéra to make the fight against impunity for grave international crimes a top priority for his government.

President Touadéra was sworn in on March 30, 2016, as the fourth democratically elected president since the country's independence in 1960. During the electoral campaign, the presidential candidates, including President Touadéra, confirmed the importance of creating the conditions for dialogue between communities, of breaking with past violence, and of holding accountable those responsible for serious crimes.

As the president has now taken office, it is time to put these words into action and to take concrete steps toward delivering justice.

The May 2015 Bangui Forum on Reconciliation clearly showed that the people of the Central African Republic want to turn the page on impunity. The forum rejected amnesties and recommended several accountability mechanisms. The transitional government of Catherine Samba-Panza paved the way toward justice, including by referring the situation in the Central African Republic since August 2012 to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and passing a law creating a Special Criminal Court within the national justice system to complement the work of the ICC.

The Special Criminal Court will be composed of international and national magistrates and staff, and is mandated to investigate and prosecute grave human rights violations committed since 2003. This combination of justice mechanisms is an important innovation in the field of international justice. It could set an important precedent for other situations if implemented successfully.

Both the ICC and the Special Criminal Court are needed given the scale and gravity of international crimes committed in the Central African Republic over the past 13 years and the current weakness of the national justice system. During the last crisis that engulfed the country in 2012, armed groups known as Seleka and anti-Balaka have committed widespread abuses against civilians, including killings, sexual violence, and destruction of private, public and religious properties, causing mass displacement. Those responsible for these crimes have not yet been brought to justice.

The Central African Republic is still fragile, and vital work is needed to rebuild the state. Civilian protection, demobilizing armed groups, strengthening the ordinary justice system and the rule of law, as well as social and economic recovery are just some of the enormous challenges lying ahead for President Touadéra. Showing firm determination to bringing to justice those who flout human rights and attack civilians is key to achieving all of these objectives.

Our organizations hope that the new President and government will build on the efforts of the transitional government and carry them further to finally provide justice, truth and reparation to all victims of grave international crimes without discrimination.

In prior [statements](#), our organizations called upon the transitional government, the United Nations, and donors to intensify their efforts to establish the Special Criminal Court.



President Touadéra and his newly appointed justice Minister, Flavien Mbata, should now take this work forward and lead the country's efforts to provide justice for the serious crimes committed against the Central African Republic population.

### **Leadership in Making the Special Criminal Court Operational**

After the promulgation of the law on the Special Criminal Court in June 2015, the transitional government took some steps toward the establishment of the court, including allocating a building for it, adopting necessary national decrees for appointing personnel, and establishing a committee to select national magistrates.

But a lot more work is needed to make the court a reality.

In that regard, the establishment by the Central African authorities of a contact group in Bangui of relevant Central African stakeholders could be important in increasing ownership and creating a plan for the implementation of the Special Criminal Court. Such a national group would be a key interlocutor for international partners and would help coordinate necessary international support for the court.

In addition, the government and key international partners, including the United Nations, could set-up a joint [steering committee](#) at the political leadership level to keep progress on track. Continued commitment, as well as financial and logistical support, from international partners, including the United Nations agencies and the peace-keeping mission MINUSCA, will be critical for the success of the Special Criminal Court.

Our organizations call on President Touadéra and his government to take leadership and guide efforts on the Special Criminal Court so that justice can prevail and the Central African Republic can become a model of accountability for grave international crimes.

### **Full cooperation with the International Criminal Court**

On the basis of the referral by the President of the transition Catherine Samba-Panza in April 2014, the ICC prosecutor opened a second investigation in the Central African Republic in September 2014, which is ongoing.

Our organizations call on President Touadéra and its government to provide continued and full cooperation with the ICC to ensure the success of its work. Cooperation should be provided to the Office of the Prosecutor in relation to investigations, as well as to the other organs of the court that carry out other important activities such as the protection of

victims and witnesses, facilitation of the participation of victims in ICC proceedings, and outreach to affected communities and other stakeholders.

Bangui, April 21, 2016

**Signatory organizations**

*Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture et la Peine de Mort (ACAT/RCA)*

*Amnesty International*

*Association des Femmes Juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC)*

*Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF)*

*Bureau Information des Droits de l'Homme (BIDH)*

*Civisme et Démocratie (CIDEM)*

*Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix (CEJP)*

*Enfants Sans Frontières (ESF)*

*Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH)*

*Femme Action et Développement en Centrafrique (FADEC)*

*Human Rights Watch*

*Lead Centrafrique (Lead)*

*Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (LCDH)*

*Mouvement des Droits de l'Homme et Action Humanitaire (MDDH)*

*Observatoire Centrafricain des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH)*

*Observatoire Centrafricain pour les Elections et la Démocratie (OCED)*

*Observatoire pour la Promotion de l'Etat de Droit (OPED)*

*Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)*

*REDRESS*

*Réseau des ONGs de Promotion et de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RONGDH)*

*Réseau national de la Jeunesse pour les Droits de l'Homme (RNJDH)*



*Fighters from the rebel group “Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation” (3R) in De Gaulle, in the Kouï sub-prefecture of the Ouham Pendé province, Central African Republic, on November 25, 2016.*

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