

## Preliminary Findings

### OHCHR Monitoring Mission in the Central African Republic (CAR)

14 January 2014

*The OHCHR mission confirms large scale killings of Christian and Muslim civilians carried out on 5 and 6 December in Bangui and Bossangoa. Deliberate killings of Muslim and Christian civilians in Bangui, Bossangoa and Bouar by anti-Balaka, ex-Séléka and civilians continue with impunity in CAR.*

#### **Background**

In December 2012, the Séléka, a largely Muslim coalition of rebel groups, launched an offensive in the north of the Central African Republic (CAR) and, on 24 March 2013, seized the capital, Bangui and deposed President Bozizé. Since the beginning of their offensive and most particularly after they seized power in March 2013, the Séléka carried out large-scale human rights violations against the civilian population with impunity. The OHCHR Fact Finding Mission, deployed in CAR from 20 June to 11 July 2013, reported that, since December 2012, the Séléka had committed summary executions and attacks on civilians, torture and ill treatment, sexual violence and widespread looting of public and private property, in Bangui and other localities. The official disbandment of the Séléka in August 2013, compounded, rather than curbed violations against the majority Christian population by elements of the renamed ex-Séléka.

From September 2013, in response to continuing atrocities perpetrated by the Séléka against the majority Christian civilian population, traditional community based self-defence groups began launching attacks against ex-Séléka and against Muslim civilians seen as supporting them. Soldiers from the former national armed forces (ex-FACA) and Presidential Guard, loyal to President Bozizé, reportedly organised, armed and joined these groups, under a common umbrella known as anti-Balaka.

On 5 December, anti-Balaka forces mounted coordinated attacks against ex-Séléka in Bangui. The same day, the French launched the military ‘Operation Sangaris’ in CAR, aimed at restoring security and providing support to the African-led military operation FOMAC<sup>1</sup>, which became MISCA<sup>2</sup> on 19 December. The attack of 5 December in Bangui prompted a series of reprisals by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka, which spiraled into sectarian violence against and between Muslim and Christian civilians in the capital and elsewhere in the country. An estimated 1,000 persons were killed in Bangui as a result of the 5 and 6 December violence.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) deployed a human rights monitoring team to CAR from 12 to 24 December 2013, to report on the human rights situation, in particular since the 5 December attacks. The team carried out 183 interviews in Ouham, Nana-Mambéré and Bangui prefectures with victims and witnesses, as well as other relevant interlocutors.

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<sup>1</sup> Multinational Force of Central Africa

<sup>2</sup> International Support Mission to the Central African Republic

### **5-6 December attacks in Bangui**

On 5 December, anti-Balaka forces launched coordinated attacks against ex-Séléka in Bangui. The mission received multiple accounts of anti-Balaka forces killing ex-Séléka, but also deliberately targeting Muslim civilians, including women and children. For example, a 55-year-old Chadian woman recounted that she lost two brothers and two sisters during the anti-Balaka attacks against Muslim communities in the Boy-Rabe and Boeing neighbourhoods on 5 and 6 December 2013. The bodies of two of the victims had been mutilated.

In response, ex-Séléka launched a series of reprisal attacks in Bangui and other parts of the country, including numerous summary executions, mostly of male civilians. Women interviewed recounted how ex-Séléka had shot dead their male relatives and opened fire on fleeing crowds of civilians. Ex-Séléka detained and reportedly executed civilian males, including boys, in their Camp Kassai, in Bangui, and searched for and executed men and boys at hospitals, including severely injured patients. For example, on 5 December 2013, ex-Séléka reportedly entered the Hôpital de l'Amitié in Bangui, removed 14 men and shot them dead outside the hospital, also killing a man and the injured teenage boy he was wheeling towards the hospital. Several sources reported that another 20 to 30 men were taken away from the hospital in a truck by ex-Séléka and have not been seen since.

According to eyewitnesses, the local Muslim population participated in the killings and in the looting of properties, such as in PK12 and in PK23 areas, where a group of men wearing military uniforms and Muslim Peul civilians (Mbororos) were seen entering into multiple civilian residences, separating the women and men, and killing the men.

The events of 5 December were followed by several days of clashes and a series of retaliatory attacks at the hands of both parties, but also between Christian and Muslim civilians. In addition to killings, the mission received multiple accounts of sexual violence, torture, enforced disappearances, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, as well as widespread looting and property destruction, including deliberate burning of civilian homes and instances of burning of churches and mosques. Most of the accounts regarding attacks on places of worship involved anti-Balaka attacking Muslim mosques, such as in Fohu neighbourhood, where 200 anti-Balaka elements attacked the mosque, reportedly killed several people, mutilated their bodies and burnt the mosque.

Numerous interviewees identified the ex-Séléka perpetrators as being Chadian nationals. Witnesses consistently reported that ex-Séléka wearing the armbands of Chadian FOMAC went from house to house searching for anti-Balaka, and shot and killed civilians, including children, women, elderly and disabled civilians.

The mission received multiple testimonies of collusion between some Chadian FOMAC elements and ex-Séléka forces. For example, a credible source reported that, on 5 December, in District 4, at around 3 pm, several witnesses had seen ex-Séléka, jointly with Chadian FOMAC, going door-to-door looking for anti-Balaka and indiscriminately killing at least 11 people, including elderly women, sick persons, and persons with mental disabilities, who had been unable to flee in the morning.

Medical sources and ICRC<sup>3</sup> confirmed that, as a result of the violence on 5 and 6 December in Bangui, at least 405 people were killed and 205 received treatment for conflict related injuries. The actual number of deceased and injured is much higher and most estimates indicate that over 1,000 Christians and Muslims were killed.

### **5 and 6 December violence in and around Bossangoa**

On 5 December 2013, ex-Séléka in Bossangoa, Ouham Prefecture, were informed of the anti-Balaka attack in Bangui and the death of their commander, General Yahya. They launched reprisal attacks against the Christian population in the town. These attacks reportedly resulted in the killing of dozens of people in Bali, Sembé and Boro neighbourhoods. Anti-Balaka counter-attacked, reportedly killed several Muslim civilians and ex-Séléka, as well as a FOMAC soldier, and took control of Bossangoa. On 6 December, ex-Séléka returned to Bossangoa and further killings were narrowly averted thanks to FOMAC commanders, who convinced ex-Séléka not to attack the 40,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had sought refuge at the local church. At least 30 fighters and civilians from each side were killed during the two days of violence.

### **Violation of human rights since 7 December**

Each day, throughout the mission's deployment and until its end on 24 December, multiple incidents were reported of Muslim and Christian civilian killings, particularly in Bangui, but also in other parts of the country, such as Ouham and Nana-Mambéré prefectures.

The mission received several credible reports and testimonies of killings and disappearances in Bangui after the events of 5 and 6 December. For example, an eyewitness reported that two IDPs from Eglise Saint Paul were killed by ex-Séléka on 7 December. On 13 December, UN sources reported that eight Christian and Muslim civilians were killed in different Bangui neighbourhoods. On 20 December, ex-Séléka reportedly opened fire at the Saint Jacques monastery in Bangui, where approximately 20,000 IDPs had sought shelter, killing at least 27 persons.

The mission also received several accounts from the Muslim community in the neighbourhoods of Combattant, Gabongo and other parts of Bangui of ongoing attacks and killings of Muslim civilians, including entire families, by anti-Balaka.

During interviews carried out in Bouar, Nana-Mambéré Prefecture, the mission received several reports of human rights violations carried out by anti-Balaka, ex-Séléka and civilians throughout December, including killings and widespread burning of civilian homes. For example, on 11 December, in Loh village, near Bohang, following the arrest and execution of a man by ex-Séléka, a group of men from the village reportedly launched a revenge attack against ex-Séléka, resulting in the death of at least 25 ex-Séléka and Muslim civilians and 33 injured. After the event, ex-Séléka and Muslim civilians reportedly attacked the Christian population in Loh and surrounding villages.

On 16 December, in an area some 12 kms from Bossangoa, Ouham Prefecture, a group of 10 women were allegedly killed by armed Muslim Peul civilians (Mbororos).

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<sup>3</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross

The deployment of Sangaris, the increase in FOMAC/MISCA troops, and subsequent cantonment of ex-Séléka has deterred, to some extent, further large scale attacks by ex-Séléka against anti-Balaka and Christian civilians. Attacks against the civilian population, however, continue on a daily basis despite the presence of international forces. Moreover, the mission received multiple reports that the disarmament of ex-Séléka carried out by the French forces left Muslim communities vulnerable to anti-Balaka retaliatory attacks. There were several incidents in Bangui during which anti-Balaka or hostile mobs targeted and killed recently disarmed ex-Séléka elements and their families.

### **Women and children**

Women and children have been particularly vulnerable and affected by the unfolding crisis. The mission received a number of accounts of sexual violence against women and girls committed by armed groups with absolute impunity, including rape and sexual slavery. The majority of accounts identified ex-Séléka as the perpetrators, although the team also received testimonies of sexual violence by anti-Balaka. Medical structures are barely functional in CAR, neither are women's rights or human rights organisations. Furthermore, many of the potential victims are displaced and cannot access available medical care for security reasons. Therefore, the true extent of sexual violence in CAR is yet to be determined.

Children have also been severely affected by the ongoing violence. Like adults, children have been victims of killings, disappearances, torture, ill treatment and sexual violence. In addition, the UN and international human rights organisations have reported the recruitment and use of children by both armed groups. Schools in Bangui and other towns remain closed.

### **Humanitarian situation**

Throughout the reporting period and since, the humanitarian situation in CAR has continuously deteriorated. Latest displacement estimates from OCHA indicate that, as of 3 January, 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the population of CAR (935,000 persons) is displaced, including half of the population of Bangui (513,000 persons). The delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially outside Bangui, to those IDPs sheltering in the bush, is hampered by the volatile security situation. Nearly half of the country's population is in need of humanitarian assistance.

### **Conclusion**

The mission findings, while not exhaustive, highlight the risk of a further deterioration of the security and human rights situation in CAR, with continuing daily reports of deliberate targeting of Christian and Muslim men, women and children, in and outside Bangui. The rising number of IDPs raises further humanitarian and protection concerns. Women and girls are at risk of increased exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, in particular those displaced in IDP camps, in host communities or in the bush. The protection of civilians remains the priority concern.

OHCHR encourages religious leaders to repeat calls for tolerance and respect within their communities. OHCHR supports mediation initiatives aiming at bringing the Muslim and Christian communities together with a view to ending tension and fostering common understanding and respect.

National authorities and the international community should also prioritise accountability for perpetrators of serious human rights violations and abuses. In this regard, OHCHR welcomes the

establishment of an international Commission of Inquiry which will send a strong message to perpetrators of violations and abuses that the international community is committed to holding them accountable.

*OHCHR has been present in CAR through the BINUCA Human Rights and Justice Section since January 2010. From 20 June to 11 July 2013, OHCHR deployed a Fact-Finding Mission to the country to collect information on human rights violations committed in Bangui and other localities between December 2012 and July 2013, the findings of which were presented by the High Commissioner at the Human Rights Council 24<sup>th</sup> session of September 2013.*