
Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

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Central African Republic:

The time is up: protect civilians in Central African Republic

Anti-balaka (which means anti machete – militia made up of Christians) militias are carrying out violent attacks in an effort to ‘ethnically cleanse’ Muslims in the Central African Republic.

The existing international peacekeeping forces, including the French operation Sangaris and the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA) have not been able to contain the violence nor curb the flight of entire Muslim communities to neighboring countries. According to the latest UN estimate in early March, only 900 of 140,000 Muslims remain in Bangui, and those left behind fear for their lives. Dozens of towns and villages in the western third of the country, which once were home to thousands of Muslims, have been forcibly emptied of their Muslim population. Many homes, churches and mosques have been destroyed, as witnessed by Amnesty International.

Amnesty’s research and recent mission shows that the situation in Central African Republic is dire and that increased support from the international community is needed. This is supported by other reports including the latest report of the UN Secretary General to the UN Security Council recommending a transition to a United Nations peacekeeping mission with a primary mandate to protect civilians.

Reports are also indicating that the anti-balaka militias are increasingly becoming organised and the Séléka forces are regrouping in the northeast of the Central African Republic (CAR). This is further compounded with increased proliferation of arms and weapons into the country in breach of the United Nations Security Council arms embargo.

What you need to do:

Take action to call for protection of civilians

Hundreds of thousands of civilians need effective protection from the international community. Please use the attached sample letter and call on the United States, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to take action now. Please send copies to:

Secretary of State John Kerry

Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington DC 20520

Ambassador Samantha Power

United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, N.Y. 10017

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GOT QUERIES OR WANT TO DO MORE?

For queries about this action please contact:

activim@amnesty.org.uk / 020 7033 1675

www.amnesty.org.uk/central-african-republic

Local group’s monthly mailing can be downloaded from:

www.amnesty.org.uk/groups

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Background Information

Central Africa Republic:

The time is up: protect civilians in Central African Republic

'Ethnic cleansing' of Muslims have been carried out in the western part of Central African Republic the most populous part of the country, since early 2014. Entire Muslim communities have been forced to flee, and hundreds of Muslims who have not managed to escape have been killed by the loosely organised militias known as anti-balaka.

The ethnic cleansing of Muslim communities is part of a larger tragedy unfolding in the Central African Republic. Since the mostly Muslim Seleka coalition seized power in March 2013, the country has been shattered by violence, much of it against members of the Christian community.

The Seleka, which left power in mid-January 2014, killed thousands of Christian civilians, and plundered and burned thousands of Christian homes. The lawless and abusive nature of their rule gave rise to unprecedented sectarian violence and hatred, with many Christians attributing responsibility for the Seleka's abuses to the country's Muslim minority as a whole. Their fear, anger, and desire for revenge spurred the development of the predominantly Christian anti-balaka.

Amnesty International has documented large-scale and repeated anti-balaka attacks on Muslim civilian populations in Bouali, Boyali, Bossembélé, Bossemptélé, Baoro, Bawi and the capital, Bangui, in January, and has received credible information regarding additional attacks in Yaloke, Boda, and Bocaranga. Some of these attacks were carried out in revenge for the previous killings of Christian civilians by Seleka forces and armed Muslims.

Ongoing anti-balaka attacks against Muslims and repeated threats by anti-balaka and their supporters to force the Muslim minority out of the country have caused intense and understandable fear. Convinced that no one is able or willing to protect them from future attacks, Muslims have fled broad swathes of the country en masse. Amnesty International has seen numerous towns and villages that have been emptied of their Muslim communities, or have only tiny rump populations left sheltering in and around churches and mosques, desperate to be evacuated to safety. Majority Muslim neighbourhoods of Bangui, facing sustained and relentless attack, have also seen mass exodus and civilians there are also increasingly under threat.

International forces have so far failed to swiftly deploy to these areas to protect civilians, allowing antibalaka militias to assert themselves. In town after town, as soon as the Seleka left, the antibalaka moved in and launched violent attacks on the Muslim minority. These developments were entirely predictable, given the deep-seated anger of both the anti-balaka and of large sectors of the Christian community, who largely held the Muslim minority responsible for Seleka abuses. Already, in December 2013, Amnesty International had warned of this danger.

The urgency of the situation demands a robust and immediate response. In order to protect the remaining Muslim communities in the Central African Republic, and to prevent the violence from spreading even more broadly, international peacekeeping forces must take rapid steps to break anti-balaka control over the country's road network, and to station sufficient troops in towns where Muslims are threatened.

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Given that Seleka forces have been regrouping in towns to the north and east of the capital, there are increasing concerns about the possible outbreak of sectarian violence in these areas. Non-Muslim populations, in particular, could be at risk of renewed Seleka abuses. To address these challenges, international peacekeeping troops should be granted the necessary resources to handle the country's difficult operating environment.

The country's new transitional authorities, as they reconstitute basic government structures and institutions, must also take steps to restore security and the rule of law. In rebuilding the police and the armed forces, the transitional government needs to take care to supplant the de facto power of lawless anti-balaka militias, not to consolidate it.

The exodus of Muslims from the Central African Republic is a tragedy of historic proportions. Not only does the current pattern of ethnic cleansing do tremendous damage to the Central African Republic itself, it sets a terrible precedent for other countries in the region, many of which are already struggling with their own sectarian and inter-ethnic conflicts.

The country is experiencing a total breakdown of law and order and there is complete impunity for serious crimes committed and being committed in CAR, including crimes against humanity like killings, sexual violence, looting, and the destruction of entire villages.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people forced to flee the violence in CAR are now facing another humanitarian catastrophe in neighbouring Chad and Cameroon. The rainy season is due to start shortly and unless shelter, food and medical facilities are urgently made available their already desperate situation will quickly deteriorate. It is urgent that the international community coordinates efforts to assist the authorities to avoid a new humanitarian crisis.

Additional Reading

Ethnic Cleansing and sectarian killings in the Central Africa Republic report - February 2014

Central Africa Republic: Human Rights Crisis Spiralling out of control report - October 2014

Please contact activism for a copy of the above reports.
