

ZEID ALARMED BY INCREASING VIOLENCE, KILLINGS, IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

GENEVA/BANGUI (16 May 2017) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein on Tuesday expressed grave alarm over the expanding attacks by armed groups against the civilian population in several parts of the Central African Republic in recent months, as well as attacks against UN peacekeepers in the southeast of the country.

Zeid said he was particularly disturbed by the increase in targeted killings of civilians since the fighting between rival groups began in November 2016.

Just this weekend in Bangassou, in the south, armed men (presumed to be anti-Balaka) used heavy weapons to attack the base of the UN mission in CAR (MINUSCA*). They also attacked the Muslim neighbourhood of Tokoyo where numerous civilians were killed and others wounded, although the exact death toll remains unclear. One MINUSCA peacekeeper was shot and killed during the attack, and another was wounded.

Also in the south, in Alindao and surrounding villages, unconfirmed reports suggest that from 7 to 9 May, clashes between anti-Balaka fighters and a group known as the “*Unité pour la Paix en Centrafrique*” (UPC) -- which is allied with the ex-Seleka -- led to the killing of some 56 civilians. It is alleged that the anti-Balaka were responsible for the death of 19 people including 13 of Fulani ethnicity, and an Imam. The UPC, in response, allegedly killed 37 civilians, and more than 3,000 civilians are said to have been displaced. MINUSCA has not yet been able to verify these allegations.

Investigations by MINUSCA’s Human Rights Division suggest that between March and May 2017 more than 121 civilians were killed (these figures do not include the two incidents mentioned above), as well as six peacekeepers. The most serious incidents include the following:

- On 7 March, UPC elements reportedly attacked the town of Goubali 2, in central CAR, killing eight civilians and looting and burning houses. From 13 to 31 March further attacks by both anti-Balaka and UPC led to the killing of 40 civilians, including five children and four Fulani men, and injured another 26. Homes were torched and people displaced from Atongo-Bakari village, and various mining sites in Danga-Gboudou commune. Several children were reportedly thrown into the nearby Ngoubrou River by the UPC elements.
- In eastern CAR, between 7 and 15 March, anti-Balaka elements reportedly attacked and killed 10 Fulani civilians in Site Chinois village and another three civilians in Bimbe village near the town of Bria. Civilians fled to various villages in Mbomou prefecture, to the south and some crossed into the Democratic Republic of Congo. Between 6 and 20 March, UPC elements also allegedly

attacked civilians in Rou and Ndjolina villages, where they killed nine civilians including two children, wounded many others, and set fire to homes.

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- • In the south, on 30 March, 13 civilians were killed and 14 others wounded following a clash between UPC and FPRC elements. The villagers were displaced northward to Guigui village.
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- • Also in the south, on 3 April, elements of the FPRC/anti-Balaka coalition reportedly killed 22 civilians in the towns of Bakouma and Nzako. On 4 April in Goulou, UPC elements are said to have attacked and killed three civilians, including a child, and wounded two others. According to information gathered from various partners, on 27 April, at least four Fulani men were killed by anti-Balaka elements in Yongofongo village. Also in Yongofongo, on 8 May, suspected anti-Balaka fighters ambushed a convoy of MINUSCA peacekeepers, killing five of them and wounding 10 others. This is the deadliest attack against MINUSCA since its deployment at the end of 2014.
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- • In western CAR, on 2 May, in the town of Niem between Bouar and the Cameroonian border, members of the *Retour, Réclamation et Réhabilitation* (3R) rebel group reportedly shot nine men in the head in a church, killing them. The next day, in a meeting with the villagers, the leader of the 3R group reportedly admitted responsibility for the incident and apologized for it. To date no steps have been taken to hand over the alleged perpetrators to the relevant authorities.

The High Commissioner said that many of the above areas had previously remained largely unaffected by violence and insecurity, and related human rights abuses.

“Violence and rising tensions are spreading to areas of the Central African Republic that had previously been spared the kinds of terrifying violence seen in some other parts of the country – this is highly worrying and should set off loud alarm bells,” Zeid said.

“The hard-earned relative calm in Bangui and some of the bigger towns in CAR risks being eclipsed by the descent of some rural areas into increasing sectarian violence, with defenceless civilians – as usual -- paying the highest price.”

The resurgence of violence has also had a serious and direct impact on humanitarian actors. During the first quarter of the year, more than 45 incidents targeting humanitarians were recorded across the country, making CAR one of the highest-risk countries for humanitarian aid. Half of the population of the CAR is dependent on humanitarian aid and one in five Central Africans is displaced.

The High Commissioner strongly condemned the acts of violence and human rights abuses, including the killing of international peacekeepers. He called on the leaders of armed groups to cooperate with MINUSCA and Government authorities to bring to justice those of their fighters who have been involved in human rights violations and abuses. “I remind those who commit, order, command or fail to prevent attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers and UN peacekeepers that they may also be subject to prosecution for war crimes,” he said.

Zeid also noted the fact that the Special Criminal Court is preparing to start its work is a strong signal by the authorities and the international community that the continued climate of impunity is unacceptable.

ENDS

* The Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)

For more information and media requests, please contact Rupert Colville (+41 22 917 97 67 / rcolville@ohchr.org) or Ravina Shamdasani (+41 22 917 91 69 / rshamdasani@ohchr.org)

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