

Central African Republic: A Struggle for Hegemony and Influence and crimes against Humanity



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ECHRD

March 2023

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Egyptian Coalition for Human Rights and Development

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Introduction:

Since September 2001, the concept of Terrorism began to spread all over the world, especially with the American quest to combat the prevalence of terrorist groups with support of the majority of world's countries, especially the African countries. However, the American attempts could not eliminate the reality of Terrorism, and the influence of terrorist groups, especially after the Arab spring revolutions in 2011, increased in Africa and some countries of the Middle East, which are considered as a fertile environment to the spread of extremism and terrorism. Therefore, the African continent has become full of terrorist groups in all its parts. Moreover, these groups seek to fuel conflicts in the continent, increase the rates of refugees and victims, and recruit young people into their ranks. So, Terrorism in Africa has become as a phenomenon that is self-renewing and spread across borders, which form a new type of wars that the continent's countries witness.

The dilemma of radical Islamist terrorism has recently escalated in the Central African region, especially the Central African Republic, which has a long history of political instability and is suffering from an armed group named "Seleka", and the terrorist group of Christians named "Anti Blaka".

In December 2013, hundreds of thousands of people were forced to flee from their homes with the prevalence of violence in the Central African Republic, as militants is brutally killed civilians, looted homes and burned villages. Until now, more than 792,584 refugees from the Central African Republic are still living in Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo.

After 2016 elections, there was a gradual transition towards Peace and Stability, but quickly turned into Chaos again in mid-June 2016, when clashes between Seleka and the anti-Blaka militia intensified again, which terrified about 30,000 people in the Central African Republic and forced nearly 6000 women, children and the elderly to seek asylum in southern Chad and Cameroon.

Thousands of people walk for weeks and hide in the forests in a desperate attempt to escape, sometimes without any food or drink. People who reached asylum sites saw painful scenes of violence and the rates of malnutrition rose to dangerous levels.

In one of the world's least funded emergencies, many people lack the fundamental survival aids. Food, Health, Shelter, Water and Sanitation are major concerns for refugees who are living off-sites and for the communities hosting them.

According to the UN Population Fund, Women and children are the most vulnerable from the terrorist groups that are the main reason for the continuity

of civil war. As there are about 619 cases of gender-based violence, including 195 cases of sexual violence and 136 cases against minors. As well as, UNICEF stated that 1.3 million children in the Central African Republic are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

Therefore, the report addresses some points related to Civil war in the Central African Republic and the extent to which women and children suffer, through some of the following points:

1. A brief overview of the civil war in the Central African Republic.
2. The origins and ideology of the Seleka and Ante Balaka.
3. The continuation of the civil war.
4. Models who suffered from the Civil War.
5. Repercussions and losses for the Central African Republic as a result of the conflict.
6. International intervention in the Central African Republic.
7. The impact of conflict on women in the Central African Republic.
8. The impact of conflict on children in the Central African Republic.
9. Recommendations.

1. A brief overview of the civil war in the Central African Republic:

The war in the Central African Republic is an ongoing civil war involving government, Seleka rebels and Anti Balaka militias.

This war is not the first of its kind to take place in the African Republic, as it was a highlight in its political history, and the beginning was between 2004 and 2007, when the government of President François Bozizé fought with the rebels until concluding a peace convention in 2007. The spark of the current conflict erupted, when a new alliance for various rebel groups named “Seleka” emerged, which controlled and seized many towns in 2012, and captured the capital in 2013.

After the President Bozizé flees the country, Seleka rebel leader Michel Djotodia declared himself president as the country's first Muslim president, and from here began the renewed fighting between Seleka and the opposition militia called Anti Balaka, and due to this fighting that Michel failed to contain, Michel resigned in 2014, and then Catherine Samba Panza assumed the presidency.

Former Seleka factions and anti-Balaka representatives signed a ceasefire agreement in July 2014, but by the end of 2014, the country was de facto partitioned, with Anti-Balaka controlling the south and west, where most

Muslims were evacuated, while former Seleka groups controlled the north and east.

Faustin-Archange Touadera, who was elected president in 2016, ran and won the 2020 presidential election, prompting the main rebel factions to form an anti-election coalition called the Alliance of Patriots for Change, coordinated by former President Bozizé.

2. The origins and ideology of the Seleka and Anti Balaka:

➤ First: The Origin and Ideology of the Seleka:

The Seleka group was founded by 5 rebel groups against the rule of President François Bozizé, in March 2013, before it managed to wrest power in favor of its president, Michel Djocodia, and its members are estimated at 75,000 fighters.

The group's ideology is to apply Islamic law, and to overcome all obstacles that stand in the way of that, as well as the movement entered into a clear hostility with everything that is contrary to its faith, and considered the blood of Christians permissible.

Earlier, the group had announced that it was founded only as a "reaction" to the violence and persecution against Muslims in Central Africa by President Bozizé and his associates, as well as that it sought to stop corruption and hand over the country's wealth to the French, but the group quickly applied practices of oppression and violence to innocent civilians.

✓ The goal of seizing power:

The group seized power on 24 March 2013, and then its leader Djokudia assumed the presidency as the country's first Muslim president, before resigning after the outbreak of violence that lasted ten months on end.

The war ended with Djocodia's resignation and departure from office because he was unable to contain the violence that raged during his ten months in power, and he accused France of fanning the flames of conflict and supporting Bozizé.

After the Seleka came to power, they practiced the harshest forms of violence and turned to mass killings, arson and rape.

✓ Seleka abuses in the Central African Republic:

The group launched an offensive in December 2012 and quickly approached the capital, taking control of towns on its way, and on the road to the capital, they destroyed many villages and rural areas, looted homes and raped women and girls.

After coming to power, the group killed many civilians who tried to flee its attacks, and in some villages, all its buildings were burned, and vandalism was usually accompanied by looting, leaving sectors of civilians in a state of

complete need, and governmental and non-governmental health facilities were repeatedly targeted in several villages, leading to their destruction and closure.

Many villagers – having been forced to leave their homes – live in very difficult conditions in the forests, and with the lack of humanitarian assistance, many have died from disease, injuries and exposure to wildlife, so international humanitarian organizations have tended to provide limited assistance in some of the affected areas, nothing more.

In Bangui, the Seleka looted entire neighborhoods as they took control of the city, and areas such as Damala, Bui Rab, Kasassi and Wallingba witnessed gruesome attacks and many civilians killed, while Seleka fighters systematically looted the Bui Rap in particular, and government officials justified that these were disarmament operations.

In addition, fighting has escalated across Bossangoa to the north, killing hundreds of people and burning entire communities, while anti-Balaka groups have targeted communities in retaliation, believing that these communities are allied with the Seleka.

Almost all of the abuses, which have occurred, have been carried out with complete impunity: a small number of alleged Seleka perpetrators have been arrested and prosecutions have been initiated, but the justice system is still struggling and trials have not yet begun, and the government's conduct of business, particularly in rural areas, has been severely hampered and its performance has been limited by the coup, with many administrative buildings destroyed.

➤ **Second: The reasons for the emergence of the "Anti-Balaka" group**

With the start of the formation of the Seleka, President François Bozizé felt a threat to his existence, moved to support, and help the Anti-Balaka group, which aimed to eliminate Muslims, which had a great impact on the chaos that befell the country after the first Muslim president came to power.

Anti-Balaka was formed to respond to the Seleka in much the same way, displacing thousands of families from the area trying to flee violence, murder and arson. Those actions that dominated the country during 2013 to 2014, the peak of mutual conflict there.

The group considered that the "Seleka" is a group of Arab intruders and immigrants trying to seize and control the country's resources, and make it an area of influence for them and must be disposed of and the support of the president of the country contributed to their strength from the beginning, until it forced the president to leave office.

✓ **Violations by the Anti-Balaka group:**

Militias used machetes in their attack on civilians, detained several hundred civilians for three days in the village mosque and threatened to kill them.

As a result, residents fled fearing continued attacks by the anti-Balaka militia, and the presence of French and African Union peacekeepers in those areas was insufficient to protect the population, who were targeted by the anti-Balaka militia in retaliation for horrific abuses committed by the Seleka.

The attack was likely carried out to target and punish the community seen as supportive of the Central African Republic Peace Unit (UPC) – an armed group fighting the government.

The Buyeo attack is one of the first events during the protracted armed conflict when the government, in conjunction with members of private military companies, trained and armed young recruits locally, and established militias to enter villages under the control of armed groups.

Thousands have been killed, about a quarter of the country's 4.6 million people have been forced from their homes, and Muslims have been forced from the capital and much of the western country, in what rights groups have described as ethnic cleansing.

Based on multiple witness accounts, the "chiefs of the regions" are former members of the Anti Blaka in the area as they are responsible for most of the documented incidents. And that these acts committed in Puyo may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"As these agents are former combatants from various armed groups or anti-Balaka, the potential consequences of peaceful coexistence between communities in MINUSCA are deeply troubling," says Hanan Talbi, Director of the Human Rights Values Section at MINUSCA.

➤ **Peace Agreement and Beyond:**

In February 2019, a peace agreement was signed to end the years-long conflict between representatives of armed groups and the Central African authorities, and it was agreed that free elections are the way to stop the state of violence that has ruined the country, put it in the grip of external elements, and wasted much of its wealth. Representatives of the Seleka militia, and the "Anti-Balaka" militia signed the agreement, and the agreement stipulates in one of its paragraphs that the Seleka abandon their demand to divide the country.

"We have signed the ceasefire agreement before everyone, and our commitment to it is unwavering," said Mohamed Moussa Dhafan, head of the Seleka delegation, while Patrick Edouard Ngaisona, head of the anti-balaka

negotiating delegation, stressed that anyone who violates the ceasefire will be arrested.

However, after a peace deal was reached with the government, both sides ignored it, as rebels advanced from Bangui, forcing former President Bozizé to flee.

➤ **Post-Convention:**

Seleka rebels reject ceasefire deal, demanding the country be divided between Christians and Muslims.

Seleka military commander Yusuf Zondik said his forces would ignore the ceasefire agreement agreed, adding that the agreement was concluded without proper notification of its details to the military wing of the former Seleka alliance.

3. The continuation of the civil war:

The major armed groups controlling the vast majority of the territory of the Central African Republic announced their merger into a single alliance in 2020, as members of the armed groups decided to merge all their movements into a single entity named "Patriots for Change and Unified Leadership". As well as, the new alliance called all other armed groups to join the alliance.

This alliance is threatening the capital Bangui with a remote blockade, while the first round of presidential and legislative elections is scheduled on 27 December, but the opposition fears widespread fraud.

The danger of the new alliance lies in its attempts to penetrate the regular army in this African country by inviting its soldiers to join it, and it uses political language to attract civilians by calling on its members to "fully respect the integrity of the population" and "allow the free movement of UN vehicles and humanitarian workers."

The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) also announced in a statement that peacekeepers were "on high alert" to prevent armed groups "from disrupting elections". As well as, The United Nations called an attack by the groups a "deliberate attempt to destabilize" presidential and legislative elections.

4. Models who suffered from the Civil War:

Many citizens of the African Republic are deprived from the basic services, as according to the UN, more than the population need humanitarian assistance, and the number of refugees and displaced estimated at about 1.4 million people. The Republic is still one of the most dangerous countries in

terms of life expectancy, maternal mortality and malnutrition, and lack of access to health care.

- **Noudia, 25 years old, from Beltono village on the outskirts of Kabu town, in the north of the Central African Republic**, and near to Chad's borders, was at home about to sleep, when she injured with the first bullet in her stomach. The shooting quickly shattered the window next to the bed, where she was laying with her two-year-old daughter. Then Noudia and her daughter rushed to take shelter beside her husband and other 2 children who were sleeping on the floor. However, the attackers set fire to their house.
- **Tanguena said:** "I have left all my possessions in my country, and now I do not have food, as I should beg anyone to get it", adding: "I have suffered a lot all my life, as since I was 7 years old, I have been moving for a long time because of the war. Moreover, I have lost my property, my agricultural land, and everything, and I have children. However, I do not know how I can provide them with food".
- **Ten People were killed in Bambari town**, in an accident that began when a militia, which most of are Christian, beheaded a young Muslim, promoting Muslims to launch revenge attacks.
A spokesperson for Seleka group Ahmed Najad said: "Anti-Balaka detained two young Muslims during their leaving the city, beheaded one of them and injured the other, then we went to return the body to the mosque", adding: "This angered young Muslims who launched revenge attacks against Christians".
- **Frons Beldo, 31 years old, was injured with a stray bullet on the balcony** of her home in Bangui, when the Alliance of Patriots for Change reached the outskirts of the capital. Then she was taken to Seleka hospital, which is a center prepared for trauma surgery, as the bullet penetrated her hand, chest and shoulder.
- **Over the past 7 years, Yumousa Aguida, 55 years old, and his family were displaced 4 times due to fighting in the Central African Republic.** In 2016, they arrived near Bambari town, as they settled in the Eilvage camp for displaced people, Yumousa thought that his family had finally found safety. However, after a period of relative calm, a new wave of violence hit the country at the end of 2020, with the eruption of clashes in Bambari, as all 8500 camp residents were forcibly evicted, and all buildings, including mosques, shops and a malaria medical point were burned.
- **In Nazaku, which is located about 250 km to the northeast, Jan Marie and Rose know well the meaning to flee from the violence gripping the Central African Republic**, as Nazaku witnessed attacks, looting, extortion

and destruction over the last decade. Clashes broke out in the town during the elections, and Jan Marie and Rose fled the town with most of its 15,000 residents.

Jan Marie said: “We stayed in the forest for 4 months, and again we were struggling to find food, as we were all very vulnerable, especially the children”.

Most of the Nizaco residents have fled the village, like Jan-Marie and Rose, living in precarious conditions from all directions, and unable to access humanitarian assistance due to insecurity.

- **Yogoda Bangagoe, 73 years old, describes the situation:** "When a storm hits, water comes from all sides. The tarpaulin is old with holes, and the ground is just dirt, so the interior of the shelter turns into muddy. But the hardest thing for me is to feel useless, because we are totally dependent on humanitarian aid".
- **17-year-old Salaa Abdullah returned from** herding his cows outside the town when a gunman on a motorcycle suddenly stopped and shot him, leaving him bleeding on the ground.

5. Repercussions and losses for the Central African Republic as a result of the conflict:

Years of conflict and instability have devastated infrastructure and government institutions, leaving millions of CAR citizens without access to clean water, health care and food.

Perhaps the most significant losses resulting from the conflict in the Central African Republic are the following:

➤ **Water:**

About 3% of the Republic's population has access to running water, because many water access points, such as wells and pumps, have been destroyed by years of violence – others have been contaminated with dead bodies.

The prevalence of cholera and other waterborne diseases increases during the rainy season, which lasts most of the year in the south and is limited to the summer months in the north, as these diseases spread through water contaminated with the feces of an infected person, a problem made worse by inadequate or overflowing toilets.

Meanwhile, nearly 60% of the population is expected to lack access to water and sanitation in 2023, a sharp increase due to conflict-related infrastructure destruction, and epidemics, including measles, are expected to remain prevalent in 2023.

➤ **Healthcare:**

Shortages of skilled health workers and medical supplies mean that the central republic's healthcare system is barely functional, as attacks on medical facilities, patients and ambulances threaten the lack of available health care. Victims of violent attacks are treated for gunshot wounds, stab wounds, burns and rape injuries, as well as physical wounds, as the population of the Central Republic suffers from great health needs as a result of horrific violence and insecurity.

Limited access to immunizations and sanitation means that easily preventable diseases such as malaria, diarrhea and respiratory infections continue to have life-threatening consequences.

➤ **Nutrition:**

The Central African Republic currently ranks worst according to the Global Hunger Index, with a score of 50.7, it is the only country classified as very worrying, as half of the population does not have enough food, and although more than 80% of the population depends on agriculture, the ongoing civil war has forced farmers to abandon their fields.

Many markets have also become deserted after becoming the target of violent attacks, the market in Batangafu was destroyed in the 2014 attacks, and now dissolved Seleka rebels are using the surrounding area as a base, scaring locals from returning.

In January 2018, armed groups took control of the territory around the previously settled town of Paoua, driving 75,000 people to the city, putting pressure on state resources, drying up water pumps and leaving no space to grow food.

These attacks disrupted projects run by the World Food Program aimed at long-term food security in the region, threatening a city that has grown and now stores its peanuts and beans on food shipments to survive.

As of 2018, armed groups have taken control of more than two-thirds of the country, violence has continued to spread to previously stable areas, thousands of people are believed to have died during the conflict in the Central African Republic, and more than half of the population is currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

According to the United Nations, one in four citizens of the Central African Republic is displaced internally or externally, which is the same rate we are currently witnessing in the Syrian refugee crisis, more than 1.1 million citizens have been displaced, half a million have been pushed to neighboring countries, and more than 600,000 have been displaced within the Central African Republic.

In an attempt to escape the violence, internally displaced people from the Central Republic often leave without food or water, walking for weeks to hide in the bush, where they have no access to humanitarian assistance, while others flee to Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo, with smaller numbers in Sudan and South Sudan.

6. International intervention in the Central African Republic:

- **UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonović, in his report following the visit to the Central African Republic, stated that the current conflict is characterized by unprecedented rates of violence, looting and destruction, and that Seleka fighters are committing some of the "most serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law".**
- **Security Council condemns ongoing attack on Central African Republic peacekeepers.**
- **UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet condemns the Poyo incident and displaced thousands of people, saying: "I condemn in the strongest terms these horrific acts, and the government must put an end to all violations, whether committed by its forces, pro-government militias or foreign private military contractors, and hold accountable all those directly and indirectly involved".**
- **Hanan Talbi, Director of the Human Rights Section at MINUSCA said: "Given that these agents are ex-combatants from various armed groups or from Anti-Balaka, the potential consequences of peaceful coexistence between communities in CAR are of grave concern".**
- **An official visit to the Central African Republic, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour noted: "We are aware that some are concerned, as the UN report mentions who committed some of the most egregious violations, and today it is certain that someone has closely monitored and documented their actions. It is natural for the latter to worry that the justice that the people of the Central African Republic are demanding in all its factions – justice is the main objective of the report".**
- **In October 2022, the UN envoy called for efforts to consolidate the gains made in the peace process in the Central African Republic.**

- **China's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geng Shuang, stressed that** the overall political and security situation in the Central African Republic is improving, while the peace process is moving forward, but many difficulties and challenges remain. Therefore, the international community should expand support for peace consolidation and promotion of development and peacebuilding.

The Government of the Central African Republic has been actively implementing the conclusions of the Republican Dialogue, demonstrating the positive direction of talks with armed groups, and promoting comprehensive disarmament in an effort to revive the peace process. **China welcomes this, Geng said at the Security Council.**

He said: "While assisting in the peace process in the Central African Republic, the international community must respect the sovereignty and ownership of the Republic, and independently support its people in independently choosing the development path that is in line with their national conditions".

He also noted that in recent years, with the deployment of security forces by the Government, the security situation across the country has steadily improved, the scope of activities of armed groups has continued to shrink, and the facts have shown that security threats can only be dealt with by building a strong, effective and specialized security sector.

➤ **France Position:**

President Faustin Archange Touadéra, continues to rule the country with full French support, without being able to end the armed conflict and disarm the various militias and groups that carry out military violence against civilians.

This reality puts not only the Central African State, but also the African States in front of the principle of African solutions to Africa's problems, a question that falls apart in front of international solutions led by France, supported by its historical right to its former colony, and in front of the ability of African countries to control the cycle of violence between the Muslim minority and the Christian majority.

Former French President Francois Hollande's desire, announced in Dakar in October 2012, that "Africa's future will be built by enhancing the capacity of Africans to manage African crises themselves", is Paramount.

On 27 December 2012, Hollande rejected French military intervention in the Central African crisis, considering that the time for military intervention had passed, and as an attempt to embellish the image of his country and end

its role as a policeman in Africa, France was satisfied at the time to deploy a force of 250 soldiers at the airport in Bangui to protect its nationals and evacuate them when needed, but there was a dramatic change in France's position in which events in the Arab world and Africa itself played a major role.

It is difficult for France to turn a blind eye to what is happening in Africa, especially in its areas of historical influence, as the desire to restore that role prompted it to do so, and it seeks to be an important figure in the fight against terrorism, especially after the decline of its European status. As for Central Africa, the eyelid of Paris does not blink without stores of uranium, gold and diamonds, which are the most important export revenues in the country, at 54%.

France, which received a mandate from the UN Security Council to intervene in Central Africa, deployed about 1,200 troops on its territory to join the African Joint Force "MISCA", which is already deployed in the country with about six thousand soldiers, and the French forces used limited logistical assistance provided by Britain in an announcement to the English Ministry of Defense, while American aid came in the form of assistance amounting to \$ 40 million to the African Union force in Central Africa.

France has been insinuating that this Russian influence in its former colony poses a threat to its interests and the instability of the country riven by sectarian conflicts, while underlying the fear of losing influence there. Indeed, France announced last year the suspension of its military cooperation with the Central African Republic after strengthening military cooperation between Bangui (the capital of the Central African Republic) and Moscow.

In December 2022, the French Ministry of Defense announced the withdrawal of the last military unit of 130 soldiers from the Republic, and the French General Staff said in a statement: "Today, 15 December, the last French soldier within the logistical mission in the Central African Republic left on a military plane bound for Paris," adding that "this mission no longer has any practical justification, and the Mpoko camp was handed over to the Central African authorities on 13 December".

➤ **Russia:**

Russia has provided the Central African Republic with weapons and military trainers to support the government in its fight against armed militias,

based on the United Nations Security Council's authorization since December 2017 to deliver weapons to the Central African Republic.

Not only did the Central African Republic receive military aid from Russia, but also tended to control the diamond trade that was under the control of militias by collaborating with Moscow. In addition, the Central African Republic used the Russian military company "Wagner" as the first African country to receive these forces to confront extremist organizations in the country, train the presidential guard, provide personal insurance for the country's president, as well as protect gold and diamond mines in exchange for a percentage of profits.

The push of Wagner forces to Africa comes as part of a systematic Russian campaign with the aim of gaining influence and maximizing economic interests in the continent, as presented by the Sochi-Russian-African summit in October 2019 and France's appeal to access through Central Africa as its gateway that forms a link between the Arab Muslim north and the Christian south.

The Central African Republic is described as a "republic of rebellion", due to its long history in this field and has become a tradition by the armed forces represented by several military rebellions over the past two decades. The rebellion by armed movements was characterized by economic motives and demands linked to their professional rights, but it turned into a state of political rebellion and sectarian conflicts contributed by international intervention. **The Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources of the Central African Republic announced in June that Russia had helped his country regain 90% of its territory held by armed groups.**

The director general of the Russian Association of Officers for International Security, Alexander Ivanov, announced in August that the number of Russian trainers in various power structures in the Central African Republic would increase at the latter's request.

7. The impact of conflict on women in the Central African Republic:

Sexual violence against women, teenagers and even girls is on the rise in this remote region of a country that is among the poorest in the world and is suffering from civil war.

Gender-based violence has taken on alarming proportions in the Central African Republic, particularly in the wake of the crisis that has plagued the country for several years, and this situation is exacerbated by unfavorable social and cultural norms for women and girls, despite the existence of policies and legislation.

According to GBVIMS statistics collected in dedicated services covering only 52% of the country's sub-prefectures, 11,732 cases of gender-based violence were recorded between January and June 2022, which is more than the total cases recorded in 2021, and 11,592 cases of gender-based violence were recorded in 2021, an increase of 26% compared to 2020. Furthermore, these statistics do not include cases where survivors did not agree to participate Data. Thus, the situation in the entire country could be even more worrying, and sexual violence accounted for a quarter of GBV cases.

In a related context, the cases of sexual violence recorded in the first quarter of 2021 increased five double compared to the last quarter of 2020, while the percentage of acts allegedly committed by weapon bearers increased from 7 to 23%.

The conflict, which intensified in late 2020, has significantly weakened the protection of civilians, while the security situation is characterized by new dynamics that increase and change the nature of threats to civilians..

Today, sexual violence is seen as the main security risk for women and girls, especially for internally displaced people. **In 2021, the Working Group on Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Arrangements (MARA) on conflict-related sexual violence documented 587 cases, an increase of 235% compared to 2020, and 211% compared to 2019.**

Survivors of gender-based violence suffer direct damage and suffering caused by aggression, as survivors have to deal with stigma often reinforced by unfavorable social and cultural norms, as well as guilt and shame and their consequences, especially for livelihoods.

Victims of sexual violence are often afraid or ashamed to return to work in the fields or resume other activities that used to support them and their families, pushing them into poverty, and access to justice is often not chosen by the victim for fear of stigma by society or because they do not see the process succeeding due to a lack of trust in the judicial system, a lack of

resources and expertise in the judiciary, or a weak presence, especially in the interior of the country.

In the Central African Republic, sexual violence is regularly used during armed conflict as a tool to terrorize and "punish" civilians, so gang rape and sexual slavery are common practices of armed groups, and gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, sexual exploitation and forced marriage, has increased during political crises.

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and security incidents in the country since late 2020 have exacerbated these incidents, which have increased by 17% over the past year, women and young girls have been the most affected, and access to healthcare remains very limited..

According to information gathered during the period covered by the UN report detailing the commission of grave violations against women, 245 women and girls were victims of sexual violence; most of them, aged between eight and 55, were gang-raped, and some of the worst acts of violence took place in the town of Bakuma, Mbomou Prefecture, which was under the control of the two armed groups as of May 2021.

The report also pointed out that victims were raped while going to the bush or to the market for food, and armed groups loyal to the Popular Front for the Renaissance of Central Africa (FPRC) search for young women and girls in their homes, and take them to military bases where they are gang-raped. Some victims have been released, while others have been kept for the purpose of sexual slavery, and they have been repeatedly raped for days on end.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights lamented: "The brutal stories told by victims of sexual slavery and sexual violence portray crimes that should never have been committed, but what is even more worrying is that they are not limited to the past; they are still being committed at this moment, and these atrocities are totally unacceptable and must be brought to an immediate end".

It urged the government to take urgent action, in full line with international law, to regain control of the entire region and re-establish state authority under the rule of law, welcomed the steps taken by judicial authorities and other state institutions to investigate these allegations, and stressed the importance of ensuring that all perpetrators are held accountable to break the cycle of impunity.

A UNFPA partner documented 619 cases of gender-based violence; out of 195 cases of sexual violence, 136 were committed against minors.

➤ **Examples of the suffering of women in the Central African Republic:**

- **Maya, 15 years old, said:** "I was alone in the field when a gunman in a hat grabbed me," adding "and begged him not to harm me", but Maya's pleas did not work, and she is now pregnant with her torturer's child.
- **Mary, 23 years old,** was looking for cassava roots to feed her family, when two armed men attacked her, and her husband fled, but she could not catch up with him. She said: "The attackers tied my hands and tore my clothes and took turns to rape me". Mary walked immediately after being assaulted a distance of 50 km, and she "prayed" not to fall into a hole, or meet belligerents, and she said, "I was troubled and I felt ashamed, and I first went to my in-laws' house, but they could not pay for my move to Paoua".
- A group of women were fetching water, washing clothes and tending to their crops, and a number of men from a local armed group abducted them, some women managed to escape but the rest were kidnapped and taken to the group's camp, and the men raped them several times throughout the day before releasing them.

➤ **International assistance to women in the Central African Republic:**

In August 2021, the Humanitarian Coordinator allocated a special envelope of US\$4 million from the Humanitarian Fund to respond to unmet humanitarian needs and scale up the response in areas most affected by gender-based violence. In addition to raising awareness among communities and providing medical, psychological, social and economic services to survivors, this special fund exceptionally includes legal support for survivors.

In 2021, 46% of GBV survivors received psychosocial assistance, multi-sectoral assistance covering at least two services, including medical care, legal aid or socio-economic reintegration. During the same year, humanitarians received only 45 per cent of the funds needed to meet GBV needs. Although progress has been made on inclusive care, CAR does not have a multi-sectoral center that can allow survivors to access all types of services as a single center, and such facilities would increase access to various services in an environment that provides protection, particularly from stigmatization.

In 2022, 1.2 million people will need assistance in the area of gender-based violence.

8. The impact of conflict on children in the Central African Republic:

The Central African Republic is ranked as the most dangerous place in the world for children, as the republic suffers from the chaos caused by the ongoing civil war and looming famine, making it the most dangerous country in the world for children's lives.

The conflict in the republic has robbed the childhood of more than a million children, many have lost loved ones in untold violence, and many suffer the consequences of physical or psychological trauma.

According to UNICEF, 1.3 million children in the Central African Republic are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

➤ **Child soldiers:**

For example, Sartorn, 19 years old, joined the Seleka rebel group when he was thirteen years old to avenge the deaths of his brothers and sister, and after a year with the Seleka, Sartorn realized that he was unable to go on killing someone and managed to escape and spent months hiding in the bush before joining the World Peace Club.

✓ **Reasons for recruiting children into armed forces:** Child soldiers are usually recruited because armed groups consider:

1. It is easy to get rid of them and that maintaining them is inexpensive.
2. The global spread of light automatic weapons that children can easily handle.
3. Relatively greater willingness to fight for non-monetary incentives such as honor, prestige, revenge and duty.
4. Children's flexibility compared to adults, which makes them easier to control, deceive and indoctrinate.
5. Those children, despite their lack of maturity, they bring their own qualities as fighters to the combat unit and are often fearless, agile and courageous.

➤ **Education:**

Many schools have been forced to close as a result of continued instability, such as those in Paoua, to provide shelter to internally displaced people from the Central African Republic. About two-thirds of the country's children do not attend school regularly or at all, an estimated 944,000 children need protection from the psychosocial impact of conflict and the risk of sexual violence among other protection risks, and nearly 400,000 children have been internally displaced after their families were forced to flee the Violent attacks.

For example, Angela, 15 years old, and her friend Inas, 11 years old, currently live in an IDP camp in the Central African Republic. Before the conflict, Angela and Inas grew up together and went to school together, and when the rebels came and burned their village, they fled with their mothers carrying nothing but clothes on their backs, and Angela and Inas are still adjusting to life in the IDP camp – receiving food rations from the UN and finding shelter in empty housing.

Hawaa said: “About 1,000 people were evacuated by trucks by IOM, some went to Moyne Seydou and others reached Cabo, as at that time, I lost a lot of my family; my father, my brother, and many of my nephews”, adding: “Before, we made a good living as traders. We even used to go to N'Djamena in Chad to buy clothes, carpets, perfumes and other things, and sell them in Bangui. Now I barely have anything. I try to do small jobs, like cleaning people's houses or selling firewood, just to survive”.

She continued: “Even if I'm optimistic, I don't know where the solution to our problems lies. I feel pain when I see my children grow up uneducated, without having the opportunity to go to school. My children have no future at all.”

➤ **Health:**

The lack of healthcare facilities in CAR is severely affecting children, with 41% of all children under five suffering from chronic malnutrition, causing irreversible damage to their health and development. Nearly half of all children in CAR are not immune, leaving them vulnerable to preventable diseases, and children are often victims of violent abuse, including murder and abduction.

➤ **UNICEF assists children in the Central African Republic:**

Despite difficult security conditions and access, UNICEF and partners continued to respond where possible, and UNICEF was able:

- Supporting efforts to free children from armed groups
- Reunification of separated or unaccompanied children
- Providing appropriate psychosocial support to children affected by conflict
- Helping mobilize communities to prevent COVID-19
- Treatment of preventable childhood diseases, malaria, HIV and malnutrition;
- Developing sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure in disadvantaged areas
- Helping children access safe learning and quality learning.

- Prioritizing child-focused, life-saving and risk reduction interventions to support IDPs, returnees and host communities in the Central African Republic who have been affected by the ongoing crisis, recurrent epidemics and natural disasters.
- Child protection needs are central to UNICEF's humanitarian response in the Central African Republic.
- UNICEF supports efforts to demobilize children from armed groups and reunite separated or unaccompanied children with their families
- Providing appropriate psychosocial support to children affected by conflict.
- UNICEF is supporting the government to respond to COVID-19, including by providing support for the safe return of children to school, particularly in crisis-affected areas
- Mobilizing communities for prevention
- Developing sustainable WASH infrastructure in maintained areas
- Mitigating the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable children.

➤ **Conclusion:**

There is an urgent need for concerted national, regional and international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian, economic, political and security crises facing the majority of the continent's States, particularly in the Central African Republic, which are becoming more critical for women and children as the most vulnerable groups. Terrorist organizations are successfully recruiting them to support their activities and establish new generations of terrorists.

9. Recommendations:

1. Urging armed groups to cease all attacks and reprisals against the civilian population, including acts of sexual violence.
2. Laying down arms and re-engaging in the peace process as the only viable path to lasting peace and reconciliation in the Central African Republic.
3. Adopting practical and effective measures to protect civilians and prevent future human rights violations and abuses in areas affected by violence and armed conflict.
4. Subjecting any person who commits acts that undermine the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms by Central African citizens to international sanctions, including appearing before the International Criminal Court.
5. All leaders of armed groups who have been integrated into the State apparatus shall exercise effective human rights due diligence, which obliges them to respect republican laws and deters them from committing any acts contrary to their obligations under the Agreement.

6. Urging CAR's neighbors and international partners to take the initiative as peacemakers to accompany CAR towards transparent elections and refrain from any action or transgression that is likely to undermine the electoral process and plunge the country back into chaos.
7. Urging the UN Security Council to take urgent measures and send a strong message to CAR actors that the risks of violence are real."
8. The Special Criminal Court in the Central African Republic should adopt a specific trial strategy, given the wide scope of crimes committed during conflicts and the impossibility of prosecuting all perpetrators.

Egyptian Coalition for Human Rights and Development