CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Attacks and military use affected hundreds of schools and tens of thousands of children in the Central African Republic. Teachers and students also faced the threat of physical harm from the crossfire of battles, and dozens were reportedly killed, assaulted, and abducted.

Context

Conflict in CAR began in late 2012, with the emergence of the Séléka, a largely Muslim coalition of former rebels that launched an assault to overthrow the government. Beginning in 2013, there were intercommunal clashes between the Séléka and anti-balaka militia, the other main combat group in the country.[512] In 2015 the Séléka fractured into multiple groups that continued to participate in hostilities (sometimes called "ex- Séléka).[513] Smaller armed groups were also active in CAR throughout the reporting period.[514]

Eruptions of unrest continued, despite international peacekeeping efforts by the African Union, UN, EU, and France, and the peaceful election of a new government in March 2016.[515] As of November 2016, 2.3 million people in CAR needed humanitarian aid and 380,000 were internally displaced.[516] By November 2017, an additional 200,000 people needed humanitarian aid and more than 600,000 were internally displaced.[517]

Furthermore, the conflict placed women and girls at a high risk of rape by government security forces, non-state armed groups, UN peacekeepers, and foreign troops.[518] Parties to the conflict sometimes used sexual violence to humiliate and punish opponents.[519]

By December 2017, the government and all 14 armed groups had signed a peace agreement, but clashes continued in the east.[520] The fighting between the Séléka and anti-balaka also escalated in the northwest in 2017.[521]

OCHA and UNICEF reported that the violence kept children from going to school.[522] According to the Ministry of Education, the destruction and military use of schools were major challenges to education.[523] Media reports noted that, although most schools opened in the fall of 2016, more than 400 remained closed, leaving 10,000 children without access to an education.[524] CEDAW expressed concern in 2014 that the lack of security prevented female students in particular from returning to school.[525] The escalation of conflict in CAR in 2013 likely contributed to the uptick in attacks on education described in this report, relative to the numbers reported in *Education under Attack 2014*.

CAR endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration in June 2015.

Attacks on schools

There were reports of more than 100 incidents of non-state armed groups and unidentified assailants targeting schools in the current reporting period, an increase in the rate of reported attacks on schools from the 2009-2013 period covered by *Education under Attack 2014*. Schools were continually attacked throughout the current reporting period. A series of Education Cluster assessments found that 17.5 percent of purposefully sampled schools were attacked as of August 2013, 33 percent as of February 2014, and 38 percent as of April 2015, yet it was not clear that the rate of attacks on schools accelerated during this period.[526] The increased percentages of school attacks may instead have been cumulative. Attacks on schools included threats against educational personnel and military occupation of schools, and the Education Cluster noted that threats and military use often occurred in conjunction with attacks on schools.[527]

The UN verified 36 attacks on schools during 2013, including looting, ransacking, and arson, which led to the closure of many schools.[528] In one of these cases, the Séléka burned down a school in Nana-Grébizi prefecture after school personnel refused to give their archives to the group.[529] The CAR Education Cluster assessment conducted in August 2013 found that 108 out of 176 assessed schools were looted, including by breaking windows and doors and stealing desks, blackboards, school cabinets, textbooks, official school documents, canteen equipment, and food.[530] Bullets or shells hit 16 of the assessed schools, and Séléka soldiers set three of the 176 assessed schools on fire.[531] During the second half of 2013, the Education Cluster also reported eight schools damaged by gunfire or explosives and three cases of arson.[532]

As in 2013, looting continued to be the most common form of attack on schools in 2014. A second survey conducted by the Education Cluster in February 2014 found that 111 out of 384 randomly sampled schools had experienced an attack, 70 percent by looting.[533] These attacks also included military occupation. It was not clear whether any of these schools overlapped with those sampled by the Education Cluster during the previous year. Bangui, Ouham, and Ouaka were the hardest hit regions.[534] An Education Cluster database included 50 incidents of attacks on schools that occurred in 2014, with 30 cases of looting, 13 cases of schools hit by bullets or set on fire, and 7 cases in which the two forms of attack occurred in the same incident.[535]

The rate of attacks on schools may have declined in 2015, despite the Education Cluster's finding that the cumulative number of schools attacked was higher in 2015 than in previous years.[536] The UN verified 19 attacks on schools in 2015, about half as many as in 2013.[537]

Information from a random survey of 335 schools conducted by the Education Cluster in April 2015 found that some forms of attack were more common in some prefectures than in others. For example, schools were most commonly burned in Ouham and Ouham- Pendé prefectures, looted in Ombella-Mpoko prefecture, and damaged by gunfire in Bangui.[538] The perpetrators were often unknown.

Overall, however, looting continued to be a significant problem. An Education Cluster database included 43 cases of looting or vandalism, 22 instances in which schools were hit by bullets or set on fire, and 18 others in which the two types of attacks occurred.[539] Furthermore, almost every school with a food program visited by Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict between April and May 2015 had food supplies stolen, which led to decreased school attendance. Although Watchlist noted that armed groups specifically targeted school food programs, it was unclear who stole the food supplies.[540] A local NGO described one case of looting. On October 1, 2015, unknown vandals broke the gates and stole material from Mixed Schools 1 and 2 in Bozoum, Ouham-Pendé prefecture. According to a local NGO, this was the third recorded act of vandalism in three months at the school, and the lack of material prevented parents from registering their children for the new school year.[541]

Attacks on schools were reported far less frequently in 2016 and 2017, although it was not clear whether this indicated a decline in the number of incidents or was due to the availability of information. From June 2015 through March 2016, the Human Rights Division of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic found that armed groups perpetrated at least 23 attacks on schools.[542] MINUSCA also found 15 incidents of attacks on schools between April 2016 and March 2017.[543] The UN verified eight attacks on schools and education personnel in 2016, although it was not clear how many of these attacks fell into each category.[544] Anecdotal examples of attacks on schools in 2016 and 2017 included the following:

· Human Rights Watch and UNICEF reported that, in October 2016, armed men attacked a secondary school in Kaga-Bandoro during a teacher training course, killing three teachers in training, the director of the Regional Pedagogical Centre, and the vice president of the Association of Parents. According to Human Rights Watch, the Séléka was responsible.[545]

· According to reports to the Education Cluster, another theft occurred at night around November 2016, when the Séléka stole school kits from the Base Intersos School in Kaga-Bandoro town.[546]

· Fighting between the Popular Front for the Renaissance in the Central African Republic (FPRC) and the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) (l'Union pour la paix en Centrafrique) between December 2016 and at least April 2017 in Mourouba, Ouaka prefecture, damaged at least one school. Residents who spoke with Human Rights Watch researchers stated that the UPC gained control of the town in December, when they ransacked the town school and burned school documents. Residents fled the area. When they returned, the school was reportedly occupied by MINUSCA.[547]

Attacks on school students, teachers, and other education personnel

Séléka and anti-balaka fighters, as well as unidentified assailants, reportedly threatened, assaulted, and killed dozens of students and teachers in both targeted attacks and from crossfire between opposing groups, including MINUSCA

forces. Watchlist reported that armed groups intimidated teachers and students who were suspected of having links to opposing armed groups.[548]

Anecdotal examples in 2013 and 2014 indicated that armed groups and unidentified perpetrators attacked education actors in Bangui, Nana-Grébizi, Ombella-M'Poko, and Ouham prefectures. For example:

- According to OHCHR, on April 25, 2013, Séléka fighters killed a teacher.[549]

- OHCHR reported that Séléka fighters tortured and killed a school guard in Yindjiama on January 5, 2014. The Séléka had attacked the school where the guard worked earlier.[550]

- According to the Education Cluster, students and education personnel were intimidated on several occasions in the same area of Bangui in September 2014. Anti-balaka fighters reportedly intimidated school personnel using grenades and assault rifles in the presence of school children and intimidated the school director at school and at home. All were public school students and personnel, but it was not clear whether all were associated with the same school.[551]

- The Education Cluster reported that, on October 1, 2014, anti-balaka members beat the director of the Gbawélé School for authorizing the opening of the school.[552]

- The Education Cluster also documented that, on October 24, 2014, the deputy mayor of Bambari threatened personnel from the local school with grenades and arson, alleging that his children did not receive school supplies distributed by members of French military's Operation Sangaris.[553]

NGO reports indicated that attacks on students and educators continued with some regularity during 2015, with dozens of school children and teachers threatened, injured, or killed by both non-state armed groups and international forces. An Education Cluster assessment published in April 2015 found that education personnel in nearly one-third of the attacked schools (approximately 40 schools) reported having been assaulted or threatened as part of the attack on their school.[554] An Education Cluster database included 10 instances of students and teachers being threatened or attacked by armed groups.[555] Examples of attacks on students and educators included the following:

- Watchlist reported that, in February 2015, armed groups killed three secondary students between the ages of 16 and 20 who were on their way home from school. The location and exact date of this incident were not specified.[556]

- The Education Cluster reported that around March 20, 2015, in Bossangoa, Ouham prefecture, passing Séléka fighters threatened a school director, set the school on fire, and burned everything, including all school documents.[557]

- On June 3, 2015, in the Boy Rabe neighborhood of Bangui, during a MINUSCA operation to recover a stolen vehicle near a high school, anti-balaka fighters reportedly used students as human shields and fired shots at the MINUSCA peacekeepers. According to *RFI Afrique,* students were shot or injured while trying to flee. MINUSCA documented that at least 80 students were taken to medical facilities for treatment.[558]

While the situation in CAR appeared to improve in 2016, occasional attacks continued, often in the context of military use of schools, as described in the relevant section below. Anecdotal information indicated that there were at least sporadic attacks on teachers. For example:

- Human Rights Watch learned of an incident in July 2016, in Sekia-Dalliet, Lobaye prefecture, in which an anti-balaka fighter hit a teacher with a knife after the teacher tried to stop him from burning a school desk.[559]

- According to the UN, the FPRC/Central African Patriotic Movement coalition invaded a school and killed three teachers in Kaga-Bandoro in October 2016. [560]

- The UN also reported that, in October 2016, former Séléka members stabbed a teacher in Bamou.[561]

GCPEA did not identify reports of any instances of attack on students or education personnel in 2017.

Military use of schools and universities

Reports indicated that foreign peacekeeping forces and non-state armed groups occupied dozens of schools annually in CAR, often staying for several years, which forced out students and teachers. According to Human Rights Watch, the

armed groups occupying schools destroyed desks and books.[562] The current reporting period saw a rise in reports of military use of schools and universities over the 2009-2013 reporting period, likely due to the escalation of armed conflict since 2013.

The UN received reports of 36 cases of military use of schools between December 2012 and December 2015, all by Séléka factions.[563] The Education Cluster reported 11 incidents of military use by the AU's mission known as MISCA (Mission Internationale de Soutien `a la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine), MINUSCA, and French Operation Sangaris forces, which occurred between the start of the crisis in late 2012 and January 2015. The occupations ranged from weeks to months.[564]

In 2013, the Education Cluster reported that armed forces and armed groups used 22 schools for between a few hours and several years. Four of these schools were also attacked and five were looted.[565] GCPEA found incidents of military use in Bangui, Bamingui-Bangoran, Haute-Kotto, Kémo, Nana-Grébizi, Ouham, Ombella-M'Poko, and Sangha-Mbaéré prefectures. Examples of military use included the following:

- The UN collected information that, between December 2012 and January 2013, as the Séléka took control of major cities and advanced toward Bangui, it regularly occupied schools, including the primary school in Kaga-Bandoro and an unknown number of primary schools in Sibut.[566]

- According to Human Rights Watch, none of the three schools in Mbrès, Nana-Grébizi prefecture, operated from 2013 to at least January 2017, even though the MPC and FPRC vacated at least two of them, because the armed groups remained near the grounds.[567]

- Human Rights Watch reported that Séléka fighters occupied the primary school in Mbali, Ouham prefecture, from August 2013 to July 2016. During that period, teachers asked the group to leave, and the fighters responded angrily by burning all the desks and books, which resulted in a lack of educational materials as of January 2017.[568]

The Education Cluster recorded 46 cases of schools used by armed forces and armed groups in 2014. Of these, 15 schools were hit by bullets or set on fire and 20 were looted.[569] According to the UN, MISCA and Operation Sangaris forces used five schools temporarily in 2014.[570] GCPEA found incidents of military use in 11 of CAR's 14 prefectures: Bangui, Haut-Mbomou, Kémo, Mambéré-Kadeï, Mbomou, Nana-Grébizi, Nana-Mambéré, Ombella-M'Poko, Ouaka, Ouham, and Ouham-Pendé. There was also one case of military use of a university. Examples of reported military use by non-state armed groups included the following:

- Starting in March 2014, the Séléka reportedly occupied a department in the University of Bangui for six months. According to Watchlist, the group then settled near the campus after government efforts forced them to leave. This forced the university administration to declare the department unsafe and relocate education personnel and students to an alternate campus.[571]

- A substitute teacher told Watchlist that, in May 2014, the Séléka established a base near a private school in an unknown location, where they used one of the classrooms, stored materials in the school building, and washed vehicles on school grounds.[572]

- Anti-balaka fighters reportedly occupied a primary school in Sekia-Dalliet from late 2014 through October 2016. Human Rights Watch learned that the fighters apparently destroyed chairs and at least 75 desks and damaged the building.[573]

- Human Rights Watch reported that the UPC intermittently used a primary school in Ngadja, Ouaka prefecture, including as a detention center, between October 2014 and January 2017. The UPC occupied this school more frequently after 2015.[574]

- The UN documented the use of a primary school in Boto, Nana-Grébizi prefecture, by FPRC elements as a base from which to launch attacks against the anti-balaka in December 2014 and January 2015.[575]

Military use of schools appeared to become less common in 2015. The UN verified the military use of 16 schools and the Education Cluster documented the military use of 25 schools that year.[576] Séléka factions were responsible for 14 of the 16 cases verified by the UN.[577] Of the cases documented by the Education Cluster, nine occupied schools appeared

to experience attacks from gunfire or fighting within the building, students and teachers were threatened in four schools, and eleven schools were looted.[578] Examples included the following:

- Séléka occupied a preschool from 2015 to at least January 2017, according to the Education Cluster.[579]
- The UN and the Education Cluster documented the occupation on January 20, 2015, of three primary schools in Bangui by anti-balaka groups that used them as bases. Violence prevented both teachers and students from returning to all three of these schools.[580]

Although educational institutions continued to be used for military purposes, advocacy contributed to some groups vacating some schools in 2016.[581] The Education Cluster reported the occupation of 16 schools throughout the country, mostly by Séléka groups.[582] The UN verified 22 cases of military use and noted that, following condemnation by the UN, the MPC and the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain (Democratic Front of the Central African People) (FDPC) vacated six schools. The UPC and FRPC vacated three schools but later reoccupied them. MINUSCA troops occupied two schools in late 2016 and early 2017 but vacated them under orders once MINUSCA learned of the situation.[583] Furthermore, the UN verified the occupation of 10 schools from September 2016 to February 2017 in conjunction with increased fighting in the Bambari area and the towns of Kaga-Bandoro and Bria.[584]

Other examples of military use in 2016 included the following:

- According to Human Rights Watch, the FDPC occupied a school in Zoukombo, Nana-Mambére prefecture, from May 20, 2016, until October 2016, when it vacated the premises. The group justified the occupation by claiming that they were waiting to participate in DDR programs.[585]
- According to the Education Cluster, Séléka occupied the school in Kouki, Ouham prefecture, from at least November 2016 until at least March 2017, and established a base near sub-prefectural schools A and B in Bantangafo commune, Bantangafo sub-prefecture, Ouham prefecture.[586] They also reportedly established a base near Saragba school in the same town.[587]
- According to Human Rights Watch, on December 12, 2016, UPC fighters took control of Bakala, Ouaka prefecture, and used a classroom of the École Sous-Préfectorale to hold a small group of men captive. The next day the fighters gathered the townspeople for a meeting at the school and seized at least 24 men and a boy, killing most of them on the school grounds.[588]

Military use of schools remained an ongoing problem in 2017, although advocacy continued to contribute to the vacating of some school buildings. MINUSCA reported that armed groups were occupying 11 schools as of March 31, 2017.[589] The UN also reported that four schools were occupied and looted between February 2017 and June 2017.[590] Anecdotal information indicated that a range of actors used schools that year:

- Human Rights Watch reported that that MINUSCA peacekeepers occupied a school in Mourouba, Ouaka prefecture, on January 22, 2017, despite a MINUSCA directive not to use schools. As occurred in 2016, the MINUSCA troops vacated the premises after Human Rights Watch informed MINUSCA authorities.[591]
- On February 21, 2017, UPC fighters reportedly occupied a school in Liwa, near Bambari. According to Education Cluster documentation, the UPC vacated the school in mid-March 2017 after an intervention by MINUSCA.[592]

Sexual violence by armed parties at, or en route to or from, school or university

Anecdotal information indicated that some armed groups raped and threatened to rape girls at, or en route to or from, school. For example, Human Rights Watch reported in October 2017 that Séléka and anti-balaka fighters committed sexual violence against women and girls who were conducting their daily tasks, such as going to market, farming, or going to school or work.[593]

Specific reports of this type of attack were infrequent, as they were during the previous reporting period. This may be due to underreporting, as human rights organizations and news sources documented widespread sexual violence by various parties to the conflict.[594]

The Education Cluster documented three instances of sexual violence between December 2012 and August 2014:

- On unspecified dates between December 2012 and August 2013, unknown perpetrators reportedly threatened female students with sexual violence in Kémo prefecture.[595]

- Also on unspecified dates between December 2012 and August 2013, unknown perpetrators allegedly raped girls in schools in Haute-Kotto prefecture.[596]

- In June 2014, anti-balaka militants in Kaga-Bandoro, Nana-Grébizi prefecture, reportedly lynched and raped the wife of a school director, whose husband was threatened by Séléka.[597]

Attacks on higher education

There was one reported attack on higher education during the reporting period, which occurred in 2016. No attacks on higher education were documented during the previous reporting period of 2009 to 2013.

On March 14, 2016, the Human Rights Division of MINUSCA spoke with a male student who said he was shot by members of the armed forces during a student demonstration at the University of Bangui.[598]

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