



The statement of Under Secretary-General/Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Mr. Adama Dieng on the human rights and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis in the Central African Republic

22 January 2014

Mr. President, members of the Council, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I thank the Permanent Missions of Jordan and Luxembourg, particularly His Excellency Ambassador Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein and Her Excellency Ambassador Sylvie Lucas, for convening this briefing on the human rights and humanitarian dimensions of the crisis in the Central African Republic.

Mr. President, as you are aware, I visited the Central African Republic between 17 and 21 December 2013 together with my colleagues Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and Nancee Bright, who represented Zainab Bangura, the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Our main objective was to assess the risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity (atrocity crimes) occurring in the country and to advocate with transitional authorities and other relevant stakeholders for a cessation of violence and enhanced protection of the civilian population.

It was evident from what we saw and heard that the situation in Central African Republic was desperate. We received reports, and testimonies from victims and witnesses, that told of shocking episodes of violence perpetrated against innocent Central Africans, including women and children. And this violence continues, even as we are discussing the human rights and humanitarian situation in CAR today.

As I said in my previous statement at the "Arria formula" meeting of the Security Council on 1 November 2013, we face a situation of widespread and massive violations of human rights and abuses, such as has never been witnessed before in the country. There have been widespread reports of summary executions and other forms of extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearances; forced displacement; and acts of mutilation and sexual violence committed against adults and children, as well as the destruction and widespread looting of property, including hospitals, schools, churches and mosques.

At the same time, as you will hear in greater detail from my colleague ASG Kyung-Wha Kang, the humanitarian situation is equally very disturbing. Thousands have fled to seek refuge in neighboring countries, while some 902,000 people have been displaced across the country. In

Bangui, which has witnessed the highest level of violence, one in every two residents has been displaced from their homes.

Who is Responsible?

In response to continued attacks by ex-Séléka elements targeting Christian civilians since December 2012, traditional, community-based self-defence groups across the country evolved into a more organised Christian militia known as the “anti-Balaka”, which has targeted ex-Séléka members and Muslim civilians suspected of supporting the ex-Séléka. Reports received indicate that the anti-Balaka militia are getting more organized than before and reportedly include some former army soldiers sympathetic to former President Bozize. These former soldiers have reportedly played a leadership role in organizing attacks against Muslim civilians. For example, attacks in Bangui on 5 and 6 December resulted in the death of at least 1,000 people, most of whom were ex-Séléka members and Muslim civilians. In interviews with some individuals who claimed to be members of anti-Balaka militia in Bangui, they alleged that the militia have deployed in all the sixteen provinces in the country to mobilize Christian civilians against Muslim civilians.

On the other hand, the ex-Séléka elements continue to carry out attacks against Christian civilians throughout the country. While in CAR, we received testimonies who witnessed the killing of Christian civilians by ex-Séléka during a series of reprisal attacks.

The religious leaders in Bossangoa had divergent views on who bear responsibility for the ongoing violence in the Province. The Bishop of Bossangoa Diocese, decried the abuses committed against Christians and the perceived complicity of the Muslim communities. On the other hand, the representative of the Muslim community in Bossangoa decried continued attacks against Muslims by anti-Balaka who, in his view, were being hosted and supported by the local Catholic bishop.

In consultations with the then Head of Transition, Michel Djotodia, I stated to him clearly that he bears primary responsibility for security and that he should take all measures possible to protect all populations, irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliation. We urged Mr. Djotodia to join forces with religious leaders and civil society to immediately embark on a reconciliation campaign aimed at putting an end to the violence and to the hatred between communities.

The Sectarian Element of the Conflict

Mr. President, the violence that was initially perceived as a confrontation between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militia quickly evolved into a very dangerous confrontation between Muslim and Christian civilians and the level of hatred between these communities shocked me. Incitement to commit violence on the basis of religion or ethnicity and deliberate and targeted attacks against civilians based on their identity are both factors that indicate a high risk both of crimes against humanity and of genocide.

Protection of the Civilian Population

There is no doubt that the actions of the African Union peacekeeping force known as MISCA and of French troops have contributed immensely to the protection of Central Africans, particularly in and around IDP camps. However, it is evident that their resources and capacity to protect are limited, given the scale of the violence and the fact that it is happening across the country MISCA is still only partially deployed. There is an urgent need for the full deployment of MISCA peacekeepers as soon as possible.

Another concern emerging from our mission and which has had a negative impact on civilian protection was the perception by some that peacekeepers deployed in the country were not neutral. Some interlocutors alleged that peacekeepers, in some instances, are perceived to side either with anti-Balaka or ex-Séléka elements, which has eroded trust in some instances and affected their capacity to act.

In our interaction with religious leaders, we noted that despite concerted efforts by the Archbishop and the Imam of Bangui to promote peace and dialogue, the impact of the initiatives undertaken since December 2012 remains limited. There is an urgent need to support – and intensify - such inter-religious dialogue both at the national and at the community level.

Overall Assessment of the Situation

In my assessment, the widespread, unchecked nature of attacks by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militia, as well as by armed civilians associated with them, against civilians on the basis of religion or ethnicity constitute crimes against humanity. If not halted, there is a risk of genocide in this country.

What can be Done?

The primary responsibility for the protection of its populations lies with the Central African authorities. However, recognizing the fact that the transitional authorities have neither the capacity to protect the civilian population nor to exercise control over the armed elements that are attacking the civilian population, particularly women and children the international community must take concrete measures to assist the State to stop the abuses and protect the civilian population. There is urgent need to support the full and effective deployment of MISCA. African countries should urgently contribute troops to this mission.

There should be concerted efforts to promote and support a national peace and reconciliation process. There is urgent need to promote dialogue between Christians and Muslims to mitigate the existing ethnical and religious divisions in the country. As a first step among a series of initiatives in the country, my office is working to support the efforts of the President of the Commission on Human Rights of the National Transitional Council and the National

Coordinator of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to organise peace forums in the country that will bring together community and religious leaders from seven provinces. But this is not enough, and I urge the international community to contribute to this process.

It will be difficult to promote reconciliation and restore peace in the country without addressing the current culture of impunity. The human rights violations and abuses that have occurred have sowed seeds of hatred in communities. It is very important that we support all initiatives, including the Commission of Inquiry, to identify perpetrators and hold those responsible for violations and abuses accountable. We should also consider the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms. There can be no excuses or justification for condoning impunity.

Although the international community is responding late in the day, there is still a window to act to mobilize appropriate resources and to reverse one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crises of our time. We need to uphold our responsibility to protect Central Africans from the risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity yesterday.

Thank you.

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