

At a Glance

AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL BY THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Q&A: THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (RtoP) AND THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Q: How did the current crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) begin?

A: The CAR has undergone five separate coups d'état since it gained independence in 1960. This history of instability and violence (which resulted in decades of misrule, corruption, and crackdowns on freedom of speech) instilled a feeling of neglect and grievance among many populations, particularly those residing in the north. These predominately Muslim residents became frustrated with then-President Bozizé's failure to, inter alia, a) implement a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program in their region, b) investigate rebel and government crimes since 2005, and c) deliver development aid in the northeast.

Q: Who are the Séléka and what is their role in the crisis?

A: The Séléka (meaning alliance), a loose rebel coalition mainly composed of factions of armed groups from this northeastern region, overthrew Bozizé's government in March 2013, causing the deposed President to flee to Cameroon. During and after their campaign to take over the government, the Séléka reportedly used child soldiers, looted villages, and raped and killed civilians, with the help of foreign mercenaries from Chad and Sudan. Though Michel Djotodia, the Séléka leader installed as interim president from March 2013-January 2014, formally disbanded the Séléka in September 2013, many refused to disarm and continued committing human rights abuses.

Q: Who are the anti-Balaka and why have they militarized?

A: Frustrated with the almost non-existent law enforcement in CAR that allowed Séléka crimes to go unpunished, many civilians decided to form self-defense militias in mid-2013. Known as the anti-Balaka, these militias from the Christian majority in CAR resented the presence of the foreign (and mostly Muslim) mercenaries in CAR, who were fighting alongside the Séléka (also predominately Muslim). The anti-Balaka groups, believing that the Séléka were deliberately targeting Christian communities, retaliated against Muslim communities in September 2013, sparking a series of reprisal attacks and revenge killings by the anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka against Muslim and Christian civilians. Therefore, though the roots of the crisis stem from socio-economic and political grievances and are not religious, the freshly-made religious divisions add a dangerous new bent to the latest cycle of violence in CAR.

Q: Why does the international community have a Responsibility to Protect populations in CAR?

A: In 2005 (see box at right), UN Member States agreed that they had a collective responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Several civil society groups and UN officials have warned that one or more of these four crimes and violations has been or may be committed in CAR. In February 2014, Amnesty International documented how many formerly-Muslim localities were now completely empty of Muslims, warning that this displacement amounted to ethnic cleansing. Both Human Rights Watch and the International Federation for Human Rights, meanwhile, had noted that the Séléka's abuses amounted to war crimes as early as October 2013. In addition, the UN Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, has told the Security Council several times that the "widespread, unchecked nature of attacks by ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka militia...against civilians on the basis of religion or ethnicity constitute crimes against humanity." Mr. Dieng has further warned the international community that a high risk of genocide remains in the Central African Republic if these attacks are not stopped.

Q: How has the international community upheld its Responsibility to Protect in CAR?

A: The responsibility to protect populations falls on many actors, including international organizations, regional and sub-regional organizations, states, civil society, and individuals. Below, find some ways in which the international community has mobilized to protect populations in CAR:

THREE PILLAR FRAMEWORK OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established the three-pillar framework of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P), in his 2009 Report *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*:

- **Pillar One:** The state bears the primary responsibility to protect their population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.
- **Pillar Two:** The international community, i.e. the UN, regional organizations, governments and civil society, must assist states in fulfilling their protection obligations.
- **Pillar Three:** When a state manifestly fails to protect its population or is in fact the perpetrator of these crimes, the international community has a responsibility to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner to prevent or halt the commission of mass atrocities. Such action must be on a case-by-case basis using a broad range of political, economic, and humanitarian measures, and should peaceful means prove inadequate, coercive measures, including the use of force as authorized by the Security Council and in accordance with the UN Charter.

At the United Nations:

- *Security Council:* The Security Council authorized the deployment of an African-led peacekeeping operation (MISCA) in Resolution 2127 in December 2013. Also in Resolution 2127, the Council appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses and imposed a sanctions regime on CAR, which included a year-long arms embargo. Finally, the Security Council authorized a UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) on 10 April 2014 in Resolution 2149.
- *Human Rights Council (HRC):* In October 2013, the HRC appointed an Independent Expert to make recommendations concerning technical assistance and capacity-building in human rights in Resolution A/HRC/RES/24/34. The Expert made her first report to the HRC on 26 March 2014.
- *United Nations Joint Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect:* In addition to briefing the Security Council three times on CAR, Mr. Dieng and the Special Adviser on RtoP, Dr. Jennifer Welsh, put out a joint statement in October 2013 urging the international community to uphold its RtoP, which must include “not only immediate measures to deal with the crisis, but should also focus of a sustainable long-term prevention strategy.”
- *Other UN agencies/departments:* The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have all been particularly vocal in their descriptions of the atrocities occurring inside CAR and their insistence that the international community take action through statements, field visits, and briefings to the Security Council and Human Rights Council.

Regional Organizations:

- *Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS):* ECCAS held a summit negotiating a transitional government after the Séléka coup. In addition, ECCAS’ Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in CAR (MICOPAX) was the sole international peacekeeping mission in CAR in 2013 before it handed authority over to MISCA in December that year.
- *African Union:* The African Union has contributed a total of 6,000 troops and over 600 police to MISCA, its peacekeeping operation in CAR. Where it has been deployed, MISCA has contributed significantly to security on the ground. Many African countries, including Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Rwanda, have contributed troops. In addition, France deployed 1600 troops to CAR in a mission known as Operation Sangaris, which works alongside African troops to assist efforts to disarm rebel factions. The AU has also appointed a Commission of Inquiry to investigate human rights abuses.
- *EU:* The EU has deployed 800-1000 troops alongside MISCA and French forces for a 6-month mission in April 2014, with a view to serving as a “bridge” before the UN peacekeeping mission is deployed.

International Criminal Court (ICC): In February 2014, the Prosecutor for the ICC announced that the Court would open an investigation into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity occurring in CAR.

Civil Society:

- In addition to the civil society groups who raised the alarm and monitored/documentated the atrocities in CAR as noted above, many organizations, including ICRtoP members, were adamant advocates for the authorization of a UN peacekeeping operation in CAR, including through the writing of a letter to Security Council member states underscoring the serious human rights abuses in the country.

Q: What challenges have there been in upholding RtoP in CAR?

A: Despite the responses listed above, many have accused the international community of being slow to react and respond to the crisis in CAR, despite many early warning signals. The Security Council delayed authorizing a UN peacekeeping operation twice in 2013, a decision that many civil society groups warned the UN would come to regret for years to come. According to the Secretary-General’s March 2014 report on CAR, MISCA was also not provided with the sufficient resources to fully stabilize the country, and “lacked the civilian component to adequately protect civilians.” Moreover, IPI Global Observatory, among others, accused France’s Operation Sangaris and MISCA of focusing too heavily on the ex- Séléka, which allowed the anti-Balaka to operate without much interference. Nevertheless, the UN peacekeeping operation, which is expected to be fully deployed in September 2014, provides hope for future stability and reconciliation between communities in CAR.

ICRtoP

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect convenes and collaborates with civil society, Member States, and regional and sub-regional organizations to continue close scrutiny of the consistent implementation of the third pillar and develop effective methods to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

For more information, visit our

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