

THEY CAME TO KILL

ESCALATING ATROCITIES IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Since September 2013, predominantly Christian militias known as the anti-balaka and largely Muslim ex-Seleka forces, which ousted the previous government in March, have committed brutal sectarian violence against civilians in Ouham province in northern Central African Republic.

“They Came to Kill,” based on field research in October and November, describes how anti-balaka militias, avenging ex-Seleka abuses, carried out coordinated attacks in September against Muslim communities and ex-Seleka outposts near Bossangoa, the Ouham provincial capital. Anti-balaka forces, which comprise village-level self-defense formations and soldiers loyal to the previous government, killed several hundred Muslims residents, burned their homes, and stole their cattle. Ex-Seleka forces, a coalition of rebel groups, retaliated against Christian civilians, killing many people and setting fire to their homes. Senior ex-Seleka commanders in Bossangoa appear to have condoned these attacks.

The incidents documented in this report reflect only a fraction of the abuses committed against both Christians and Muslims since the Seleka, as they were then known, took power.

Human Rights Watch calls on the country’s interim government to rein in the ex-Seleka, who are nominally part of the armed forces; protect all civilians from attack; and facilitate the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid. Concerned countries should immediately bolster the current African Union peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic and support French efforts to respond robustly to the fighting to protect the civilian population from further abuses and prevent greater humanitarian catastrophe.



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Escalating Atrocities in the Central African Republic

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People displaced by the fighting between ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces find shelter in an old factory on the grounds of the Catholic church in Bossangoa. November 2, 2013.
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SUMMARY

In September 2013, the Central African Republic's human rights and humanitarian situation took a sharp turn for the worse. After months of brutality by the predominantly Muslim Seleka ("alliance") forces, which had overthrown the government of President François Bozizé in March, Christian militias known as the anti-balaka ("anti-machete") began to organize counterattacks. The anti-balaka, which began as local self-defense groups under Bozizé, have targeted Muslim communities and committed numerous abuses.

Anti-balaka atrocities have been particularly widespread in Ouham province, north of the national capital, Bangui. On September 6, anti-balaka fighters launched coordinated attacks on Muslim communities and isolated ex-Seleka outposts in market towns surrounding the provincial capital, Bossangoa. Anti-balaka forces killed several hundred Muslims residents, burned their homes, and stole or killed their cattle, a precious source of income and wealth.

Many of the attacks involved shocking brutality: one Muslim woman, a nomadic cattle herder, told Human Rights Watch that she was forced to watch as anti-balaka fighters cut the throats of her 3-year-old son, two other boys ages 10 and 14, and an adult relative—all the Muslim males in the cattle camp. A 55-year-old man tearfully described escaping from anti-balaka attackers, only to watch in horror from a hiding place as they proceeded to cut the throats of his two wives, his 10 children and a grandchild, as well as other Muslim civilians they had captured. Some of the survivors reported hearing anti-balaka fighters say they intended to kill "all the Muslims."

METHODOLOGY

The ex-Seleka forces in Ouham province, suffering significant losses from the anti-balaka attacks, retreated to Bossangoa. There, they wreaked revenge on Christian residents, killing many and setting fire to their homes. Michel Djotodia, the Seleka leader who in August was officially sworn in as interim president until the 2015 elections, announced in September that the Seleka were being dissolved. However, the now “ex-Seleka” fighters continue to operate across the country, continuing their string of abuse.

Former Seleka fighters conducted frequent attacks against farmers working in their fields. Such killings appear to have had the backing of senior ex-Seleka commanders in Bossangoa. On November 18, the current ex-Seleka commander of Bossangoa, Colonel Saleh, in the presence of a dozen of his officers, including his then-superior, General Yaya (who has since died in the December 5 fighting in Bangui) ordered them to drown seven farmers who were wrongfully accused of being anti-balaka militia. The farmers were bound and thrown alive into the Ouham River; three survived.

Both sides have burned down dozens of villages in the province. Entire stretches of land have simply been abandoned because of fear of ex-Seleka attacks, and it is possible to drive for hours around Bossangoa without seeing a single resident in their home. Some 40,000 displaced Christians sought the safety of the Catholic church in Bossangoa, while 4,000 displaced Muslims were living in the opposite end of town, a bitter symbol of the ruptured communal ties in the country.

In early December, this fragmentation came to a head. Anti-balaka militias chased ex-Seleka forces from much of Bossangoa, and slaughtered at least 11 Muslim civilians in the Muslim Boro quarter of the city. The next morning, ex-Seleka commander Colonel Saleh took his regrouped fighters to the outskirts of the Catholic church, where his men then fired several rocket-propelled grenades into the crowded camp and repeatedly threatened to attack it unless the anti-balaka left Bossangoa. Hoping to avoid a massacre, African peacekeepers negotiated an end to the crisis, persuaded the anti-balaka to stand down, and possibly prevented a bloodbath.

The latest gruesome killings in Bossangoa present only one small segment of a much broader tragedy that has been unfolding in the Central African Republic. With between 400 to 500 dead in similarly brutal clashes and massacres in early December in Bangui, little doubt remains that the Central African Republic is engulfed in ever-widening sectarian bloodshed. France has taken note of how critical the situation has become and has sent hundreds of additional French troops to the country to assist the African peacekeeping force in providing protection to civilians, but it is still struggling to find support for a broader international stabilization force for the country under United Nations command.

Without some measure of security, it will be difficult to address the enormous humanitarian catastrophe in the Central African Republic. In a deeply impoverished country of fewer than five million people, some 450,000 have been forced to flee their homes, including 170,000 in Ouham

province alone. At least 70,000 have become refugees in neighboring Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and other countries.

Humanitarian relief workers in northern Central African Republic have found it difficult to provide assistance, particularly emergency medical aid, as violence – some targeting the aid workers themselves – impedes an effective response to the crisis. In September, ex-Seleka fighters systematically looted health centers around Bossangoa, denying the population access to meaningful medical care. Deaths from malaria and other diseases compound the death toll. In northern Central African Republic, blackboards in abandoned schools often still display the date in March when children were last in class.

This report examines the events in Bossangoa town and Ouham province from September through early December 2013, leading up to the latest round of bloodshed. A Human Rights Watch research team spent two weeks in the Central African Republic in early November, and an additional two weeks in early December, investigating the deadly and brutal sectarian violence perpetrated by both ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces. Human Rights Watch documented more than 120 killings by the anti-balaka and at least 37 killings by the ex-Seleka in and around Bossangoa. Atrocities by both sides continue to escalate, and are likely to spin further out of control without more robust international action.

This report is based on field research conducted in the Central African Republic during two two-week missions in October and November and early December 2013 by a Human Rights Watch research team, which included an independent photographer and videographer. The research team conducted interviews in the capital, Bangui; Bossangoa, the provincial capital of Ouham; and in towns and villages around Bossangoa, including Ndjo, Zéré, Wikamo, and Ouham-Bac.

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 60 witnesses and survivors of abuses by both ex-Seleka and anti-balaka fighters. Interviews were conducted in French, Sango, or Arabic with the assistance of interpreters. None of the individuals interviewed for this report were paid or given other incentives to provide information.

Human Rights Watch also interviewed Christian and Muslim religious leaders, as well as leaders of the anti-balaka and ex-Seleka militias, officials of the Economic Community of Central African States’ Multinational Force of Central Africa (FOMAC), United Nations officials, diplomats, humanitarian workers, and Interim President Michel Djotodia.

Because of the possibility of reprisal, the names of some witnesses, family members, and friends of victims who spoke to Human Rights Watch have been withheld from this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

- Provide unambiguous and public orders to security forces prohibiting attacks on civilians, the destruction or looting of civilian property, and the killing or mistreatment of anyone in custody, including captured alleged anti-balaka fighters or supporters.
- Disarm ex-Seleka fighters who have been relieved of their duties under President Djotodia's September dissolution of the group, and take action against those continuing to operate unlawfully. Provide the list of commanders acting under the provisional government's authority.
- Provide full cooperation to the French and African Union troops deployed under UN Security Council Resolution 2127 to protect civilians and signal support for a UN peacekeeping mission.
- Facilitate access by humanitarian agencies to provide food, medicine, shelter, and other essentials to displaced and at-risk populations.
- Protect all civilians vulnerable to attacks by ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces.
- After a vetting process to exclude individuals responsible for human rights abuses, reinstate members of the police, gendarmerie, and regular army after providing appropriate human rights training. Deny government positions to ex-Seleka fighters found responsible for serious human rights abuses.
- Investigate and prosecute, in accordance with international fair trial standards, all persons against whom there is evidence of criminal responsibility for grave crimes, including those liable under command responsibility, for their failure to prevent or prosecute crimes.
- Take all necessary and appropriate steps to permit school-age children to return to school, and rebuild and repair schools affected by the violence.

TO EX-SELEKA AND ANTI-BALAKA FORCES

- Cease immediately all attacks on civilians and civilian properties or structures, including medical centers and schools.
- Surrender weapons to the appropriate authorities.
- Cease all recruitment and use of children as soldiers.
- Allow humanitarian agencies to provide assistance to civilians throughout the country.

TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

- Authorize the deployment of a multi-dimensional UN peacekeeping mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Impose an asset freeze and a travel ban on individuals credibly implicated in serious human rights abuses.
- If requested by the UN secretary-general, authorize the redeployment, on an emergency basis, of troops and assets from neighboring UN peacekeeping missions to protect the civilians most at risk.

TO THE AFRICAN UNION PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

- Ensure that the African-led International Support Mission in the Central African Republic (MISCA) has the necessary logistical and financial support to protect all civilian populations.
- Consider troop deployment from other African Union member states to bolster MISCA's capacity.
- Disarm the anti-balaka and ex-Seleka forces.
- Protect vulnerable civilians in towns and rural areas.
- Create a hotline that would enable civilians to report human rights abuses.

TO THE PROSECUTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (ICC)

- Continue to actively monitor developments in the Central African Republic to determine whether crimes within the ICC's jurisdiction are being committed.
- Remind all parties of the ICC's jurisdiction and, as appropriate, issue public statements assessing the gravity of the crimes committed in the Central African Republic.

TO FRANCE, THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE EUROPEAN UNION, THE UNITED STATES, AND OTHER CONCERNED GOVERNMENTS

- Support the creation of a UN peacekeeping mission under Chapter VII of the UN Charter with a robust mandate and the means to protect civilians, promote human rights, and create an environment conducive to the delivery of humanitarian aid.
- Immediately provide the necessary financial, logistical, and technical support to African Union peacekeepers, including airlift capacity and additional security, medical, and communications equipment.
- Increase support for humanitarian assistance to aid populations at risk, including displaced persons and refugees.
- Support programs that protect, demobilize, and rehabilitate child soldiers, and assist in the repair and rebuilding of schools.
- Assist national authorities in their efforts to restore the rule of law.

Ex-Seleka fighters at a checkpoint on the road out of Bossangoa. They regularly rob local residents who have to cross the checkpoint to return to town after searching for food in the countryside. November 4, 2013.
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I. BACKGROUND

On December 10, 2012, the Seleka, an alliance of predominantly Muslim rebel groups from the Central African Republic's marginalized northeast, began a military campaign against the government of President François Bozizé.¹ On March 24, 2013, Seleka rebels took control of Bangui, the capital, and ousted Bozizé. Michel Djotodia, one of the Seleka leaders, suspended the constitution, and installed himself as interim president—a role to which he was subsequently appointed by the transitional government. New national elections are scheduled for early 2015.

The Seleka asserted that they would bring peace and security to the conflict-ridden country, but under Seleka rule, the Central African Republic has been wracked by widespread violence and human rights abuses. Seleka forces have looted communities across the country, killed numerous people, raped countless women and girls, and burned entire villages to the ground.² The exact number is unknown, and many parts of the Central African Republic, because of the ongoing violence and poor road conditions, are difficult to reach.

President Djotodia dissolved the Seleka in September 2013, but many now “ex-Seleka” fighters continue to operate across the country.³ Nominally integrated into the national army, ex-Seleka continue to exert their power through violence in much of the country, terrorizing local populations. They have increasingly been opposed by predominantly Christian militias known as anti-balaka (“anti-machete” in Sango), which in September began to strike back at the ex-Seleka forces.

¹ “Seleka” means “alliance” in Sango, the national language of the Central African Republic.

² Human Rights Watch, *I Can Still Smell the Dead: The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic*, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/09/18/i-can-still-smell-dead>.

³ “Central African Republic: Horrific Abuses by New Rulers. Ex-Rebel Coalition Should Restore Security, Provide Aid,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 28, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/09/18/central-african-republic-horrific-abuses-new-rulers>. The Seleka now call themselves “ex-Seleka,” which is how the group is referred to in this report.

An anti-balaka fighter stands in a stream near the trading center of Ndjo, which displaced residents cross daily to reach their shelters in the bush. Most of the town's 14,000 residents fled to these remote areas, which lack clean water and medicine. The village's health center was raided in September 2013, and all its medical supplies were looted. November 5, 2013.
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The anti-balaka originally presented themselves as local self-defense groups, but more and more have targeted entire Muslim communities, claiming to be retaliating for ex-Seleka abuses. Anti-balaka militias, which do not have a strong centralized command structure, are currently strongest in northwest Central African Republic, but on December 5 they staged large-scale attacks on Bangui and Bossangoa. These groups contain some heavily armed former soldiers who had defected from the armed forces under Bozizé, the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA), including elements of Bozizé's Presidential Guard, commonly known (in English) as the Red Berets.

The country's population of nearly five million is about 80 percent Christian. Muslims constitute about 15 percent of the population, and are mostly concentrated in the far northeast of the country. Elsewhere, Muslims form an even smaller percentage of the population, and are often associated with commerce in the trading centers and nomadic cattle herding.

Among the Muslims are ethnic Peuhl, many of whom engage in the cattle trade. The Mbororo are a subgroup of the Peuhl and are Muslim nomads who can be found in many west and central African countries. They continue to practice pastoral nomadism, their traditional way of life, moving with large herds of livestock from grazing area to grazing area, even though much of the livestock is now often owned by Muslim traders rather than the Mbororo guarding them. The Mbororos' pastoral nomadism often brings them into conflict with sedentary (and predominantly Christian Gbaya) farmers, whose crops are sometimes eaten by the migrating livestock. The distinctive ethnic features and dress of the Mbororo make them easy to identify, and Mbororo nomads and Gbaya sedentary farmers are often in conflict, each having biased views of the other group.

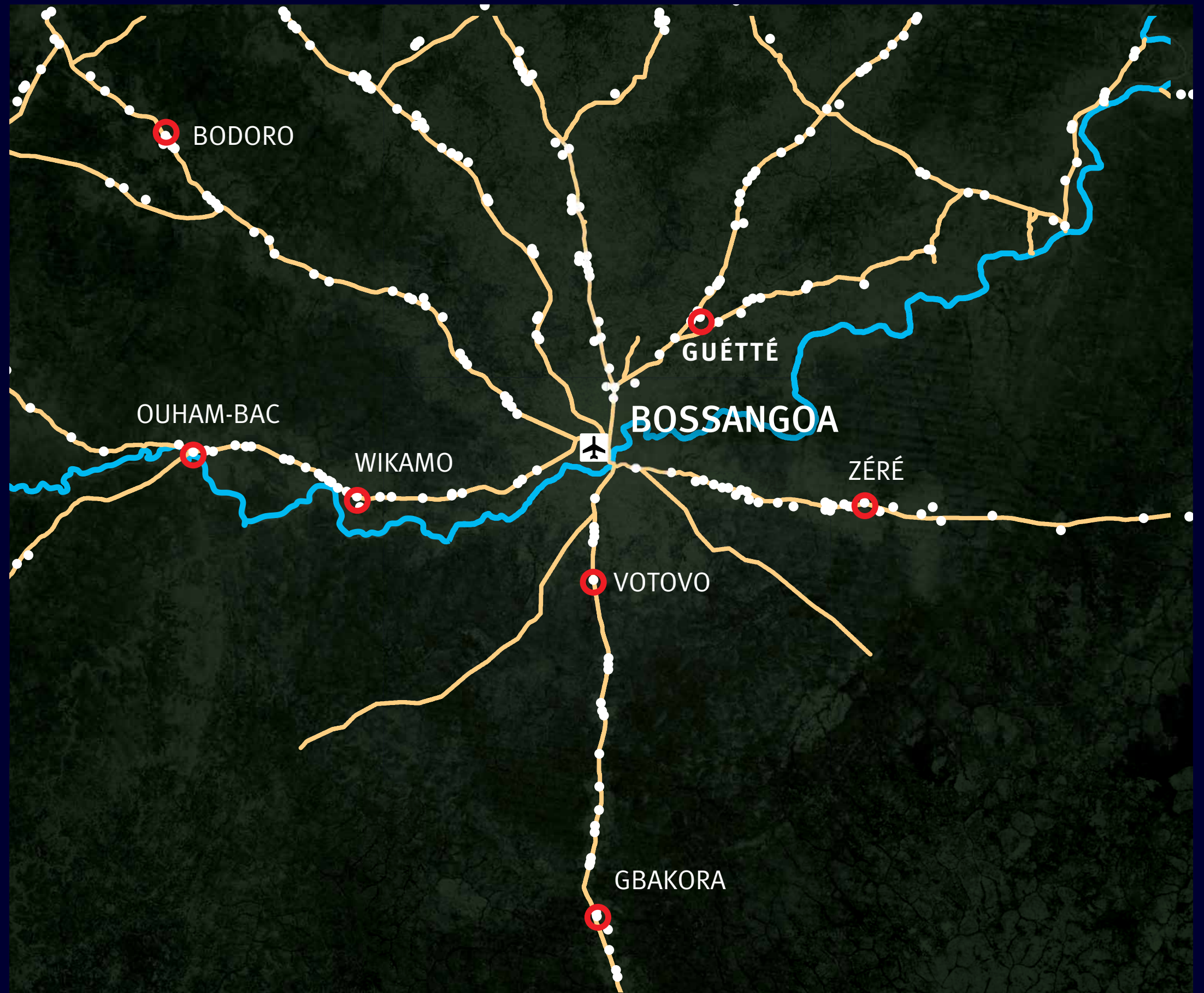
Sango and French are the official languages of the Central African Republic. Many Seleka fighters are Muslim and speak Arabic, and they mostly come from the country's northeast, in an area located between Chad and Sudan's Darfur region.



MAP OF FEATURED REPORT LOCATIONS

Human Rights Watch interviewed more than 60 witnesses and survivors of abuses by both ex-Seleka and anti-balaka fighters during two two-week missions in October and November and early December 2013 to the Central African Republic. The research team conducted interviews in the capital, Bangui; Bossangoa, the provincial capital of Ouham; and in towns and villages around Bossangoa, including Ndjo, Zéré, Wikamo, and Ouham-Bac.

- VILLAGES
- LOCATIONS IN THE REPORT



Ashatu Isa, a Muslim nomadic cattle herder, and the mother of five children, was forced to watch as anti-balaka fighters cut the throats of her 3-year-old son, two boys, ages 10 and 14, and an adult relative – all the Muslim males in the cattle camp. November 2, 2013.

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II. ANTI-BALAKA ABUSES AGAINST MUSLIM COMMUNITIES NEAR BOSSANGOA

After the Seleka rebel coalition seized power in March 2013, they ruled largely unopposed for months, frequently conducting deadly attacks and otherwise instilling fear among the civilian population.⁴ In September, anti-balaka militias organized simultaneous assaults against isolated and poorly manned ex-Seleka posts in the larger trading centers in the countryside. Around the town of Bossangoa, 300 kilometers north of Bangui, they targeted Muslim communities as well as ex-Seleka posts.

During this time, the anti-balaka attacked nomadic cattle camps of the ethnic Peuhl Muslim community, causing many deaths and stealing at least 5,000 heads of cattle, a massive financial and cultural loss.

Eric Zalo, a leader of the anti-balaka forces in Wikamo, told Human Rights Watch:

We were originally organized to fight against the coupeurs de route [highway bandits]. In Wikamo, we have a committee of 8 leaders and 213 fighters. Our objective is to fight against the Seleka because of their abuses against the civilian population. ... We have our own homemade weapons. They are made by us and use shotgun shells.... The anti-balaka are exclusively Christian, and our aim is to liberate the Christian population from the yoke of the Muslims. We are not a rebel group, we only fight against the Seleka and protect the population. [We are the youth and] we organized ourselves for our own self-defense.⁵

While the anti-balaka describe themselves as self-defense forces aiming to protect their own villages, their actual behavior and rhetoric is often violently anti-Muslim, and they have been responsible for numerous massacres of Muslims. Muslim survivors of such massacres told Human Rights Watch of extremist statements made by anti-balaka leaders during the attacks, including that they aimed to kill all Muslims. While most anti-

⁴ Human Rights Watch, "I Can Still Smell the Dead": The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic, September 2013.

⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Eric Zalo, executive committee member of the anti-balaka forces in Wikamo, November 2, 2013.

balaka fighters are poorly armed with homemade shotguns, machetes, and knives, some of the attacks investigated by Human Rights Watch also involved attackers in military uniform with Kalashnikov assault rifles and other automatic weapons; they are believed to be former FACA military personnel who have remained loyal to ousted president Bozizé, including members of his elite Presidential Guard.

Human Rights Watch witnessed large numbers of child soldiers in the ranks of the anti-balaka. An anti-balaka leader acknowledged to Human Rights Watch that his group uses children as young as 15-years-old as fighters, but not those under 15. However, during the interview with this anti-balaka leader, Human Rights Watch saw armed children who appeared to be younger than 15.⁶ On a visit to the anti-balaka stronghold of Bowaye in early December, Human rights watch observed hundreds of armed children among the anti-balaka fighters, many of them clearly younger than 15.

The following section describes anti-balaka abuses in the area surrounding Bossangoa.

ZÉRÉ

Zéré is a major trading center on the Bossangoa-Bouca road, with a community of more than 100 Muslims living next to the mosque in the center of the town. Two independent witnesses told Human Rights Watch that at least 56 Muslim residents, both traders and Mbororo cattle herders, were killed during a September 6 attack by anti-balaka elements in the Muslim quarter of the town.⁷

According to the imam of the mosque, tensions rose in the week before the September 6 attack, when anti-balaka members killed an Mbororo cattle herder in the nearby village of Boubou on August 31, and refused to hand over his body to the family.⁸ Ex-Seleka fighters attempted to get

⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Eric Zalo, executive committee member of the anti-balaka forces in, Wikamo, November 2, 2013.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Imam Zakaria Mikael, Imam of Zéré, Bossangoa, November 2, 2013 (claiming 57 Muslims died in the attack); Human Rights Watch interview with Hamid Oumar, chef de quartier of Zéré, Bossangoa, October 31, 2013 (claiming 56 Muslims died in the attack). On the Mbororo, see Human Rights Watch, "I Can Still Smell the Dead": The Forgotten Human Rights Crisis in the Central African Republic, September 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/09/18/i-can-still-smell-dead> p. 34. Or for an anthropological account of Mbororo society, see Philip Burnham, *The Politics of Cultural Difference in Northern Cameroon* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1996).

⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Imam Zakaria Mikael, Imam of Zéré, Bossangoa, November 2, 2013.

The wife and child of the local area chief of Zéré, Bouba Gai, take shelter from the insecurity in the villages surrounding Bossangoa. Anti-balaka forces killed her husband and 13-year-old son, burning their bodies and dumping them in a latrine. November 1, 2013.
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ZÉRÉ

VILLAGE LOCATION: 5.660N 16.990E

Satellite Image Date: November 14, 2013

A market center located 25 kilometers east of Bossangoa, Zéré's Muslim community and a small ex-Seleka presence were attacked by anti-balaka forces on September 6, resulting in the deaths of dozens and the burning of the town's Muslim quarter and its Mosque. Following the anti-balaka attack, ex-Seleka forces returned and burned the Christian homes. A total of 333 buildings, representing 85% of the village, were destroyed by fire based on an analysis of satellite imagery recorded on the morning of November 14, 2013. Destroyed buildings visible in the image are circled in red.

 DESTROYED BUILDINGS



Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch;
Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A;
Image Copyright: CNES 2013;
Source: Astrium.

the body by force, but were ambushed by the anti-balaka and retreated to Zéré, where they had a post manned by five ex-Seleka fighters.⁹ The presence of the ex-Seleka fighters in Zéré caused most Christians to leave the town, and only Muslim residents remained.¹⁰

The imam told Human Rights Watch that on the morning of September 6, about 100 anti-balaka quickly overpowered the ex-Seleka post, killing two ex-Seleka fighters and forcing the remaining three to flee. They then turned on Zéré's Muslim community:

At 4 a.m., we were attacked by the [anti-balaka] armed elements. We heard the gunshots, and at first thought it was the Seleka firing. But then we heard them yelling, "Advance! Advance!" We were at the mosque, praying. We heard them shout, "Catch them! Catch them! (attraper)" I saw them shoot Abdullahi, an Mbororo herder. Then they went to the house of Abdullahi Jibo—they killed him, his wife, his son, his daughter, and five Mbororo who were living with them. They went to the house of the area chief, Bouba Gai, and killed him and his son Halidou. They burned their bodies and threw them in a latrine.... They looted our houses and then burned them. We counted 57 people killed, including 17 Muslims from the town, and the rest were Mbororo killed in the bush with their cattle.¹¹

The wife of the killed area chief confirmed the imam's account of the attack in a separate interview with Human Rights Watch:

It was around 5 a.m. when they attacked our house. I was busy cooking outside. The anti-balaka came and attacked us. They began to cut my husband with their machetes on his side and his back, and cut his throat. After they killed him, they set our house on fire, and threw his body on the fire, together with that of my son. They ordered my 13-year-old boy, Halidou Bouba, to come outside and lay down, and then cut him two times with a machete and killed him. ...They also killed Bouba Mana Othman. He was on his bike near Zéré when they killed him with a machete. We found his

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Imam Zakaria Mikael, Imam of Zéré, Bossangoa, November 2, 2013; Human Rights Watch interview with Hamid Oumar, chef de quartier of Zéré, Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Imam Zakaria Mikael, Imam of Zéré, Bossangoa, November 2, 2013.

body.... They killed the village chief, Abdullahi Jibo, with three members of his family.

Following the attack, the surviving Muslims, fearing more attacks, fled into the bush. The area chief's wife said:

I fled with my children into the bush and was there for two months. I just came to Bossangoa a few days ago. My three-year-old son was wounded by a machete. I told the attackers I was [Christian] and begged them to let me go, and they believed me. I changed my boy and dressed him as a girl to prevent him being killed.¹²

She told Human Rights Watch that her 14-year-old daughter, Bouba Kandé, had been abducted by the anti-balaka fighters and remained missing, as was her co-wife and her co-wife's 3-year-old daughter.¹³

Two days later, ex-Seleka fighters returned to Zéré. The Muslim residents who returned found their mosque and homes burned, with many of the Muslims killed having been thrown by the anti-balaka into the flames of the burning homes.¹⁴ On a November visit to Zéré, Human Rights Watch counted more than 340 homes burned in the town, with only a handful of homes remaining undamaged.

Zéré's imam was careful to stress to Human Rights Watch that he did not see the violence in the town as rooted in religion:

This was not a Christian-Muslim attack; it was an attack by Bozizé loyalists. There were more than 100 attackers, they came from all sides. They had military weapons among them and included ex-FACA that defected and organized with the anti-balaka. They misled the Christian villagers, telling them that ... there should be no more Muslims present in the country.¹⁵

GBAKORA/BANDOROK

Gbakora and Bandorok are small villages on the Bossombélé-Bossangoa road, located about 45

¹² Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Zéré village, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Imam Zakaria Mikael, Imam of Zéré, Bossangoa, November 2, 2013; Human Rights Watch interview with Hamid Oumar, chef de quartier of Zéré, Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid.



A burned mosque in Zéré. Hundreds of Christian and Muslim homes and places of worship were destroyed in the town during a series of attacks by both ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces. November 4, 2013. © 2013 Marcus Bleasdale/VII for Human Rights Watch

kilometers south of Bossangoa. According to a Muslim resident who witnessed the attack, 11 Muslim families lived in the area, and there were no ex-Seleka fighters present. The Muslim residents began to hear rumors that the anti-balaka were preparing to attack their community. Muslim residents sent a representative to Bossangoa on September 10 to ask ex-Seleka fighters to come protect them, but the ex-Seleka fighters turned down the request, saying they had no fighters or vehicles to spare.¹⁶

On September 11, over 100 anti-balaka fighters, armed with homemade hunting rifles and machetes, attacked Muslim villagers in Gbakora and Bandorok. A Muslim witness said the villagers' Christian residents assisted the anti-balaka fighters in finding the homes of Muslims in the villages.¹⁷

A 20-year-old Mbororo resident of Bandorok told Human Rights Watch how the attackers had killed 11 Muslims:

They began attacking the Muslims, and the Christian

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Bandorok, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

villagers who were still in the village helped the anti-balaka find the houses of Muslims. I saw them shoot two people in front of me. They were shot with homemade hunting rifles. It was Idriss Adef, our village chief, 75, and Zakaria Ibrahim, 80—they had machetes to defend themselves but were shot dead. Eleven people were killed in total. They also killed Oumar Idriss, 40, the son of the village chief; two brothers Hassan and Ibrahim Rama, ages 42 and 35; Isein Wadai, 75, the deputy imam, and his son Shaibu, 30, and three Mbororo nomads who were visiting our village and whose names I don't know.¹⁸

He managed to escape into the bush, where he hid until a convoy of ex-Seleka fighters arrived from Bossombélé, causing the anti-balaka fighters and Christian villagers to flee. He helped locate and bury the bodies of his fellow Muslim residents of the village before fleeing to Bossangoa for safety.¹⁹

This resident of Bandorok said that many of the Muslim residents remain missing. They include Khadija

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Abdullahi, the wife of Oumar Idriss (the son of the village chief killed in the attack) and her four children, as well as the wife of his surviving brother Jamal Idriss, Cecile Djumal, 30, and her three children.²⁰

OUHAM-BAC

Ouham-Bac is a major trading center on the Bossangoa-Bozoum road, and many of the shops in the town’s market are owned by Muslim traders. A resident of Ouham-Bac, 54, told Human Rights Watch that she was at home when anti-balaka fighters attacked the small ex-Seleka post in the town on September 6. The anti-balaka killed two ex-Seleka fighters before attacking Muslim homes. The anti-balaka fighters shot dead Moamar’s 21-year-old nephew, Hassan Abaker, in front of his house, and also killed Haroon, a 30-year-old Christian who had converted to Islam. She went into hiding after seeing the two killings.²¹

BODORA

A resident of Bodora, 55, was at his home in Bodora village, northeast of Bossangoa on the Bir Zambé road, when he was awakened at about 5 a.m. on September 6 by gunfire. Outside, he found two half-dressed women in a state of panic, one of whom he recognized as the wife of an ex-Seleka colonel based nearby. The women told him that anti-balaka fighters were attacking.

As the family prepared to flee, anti-balaka fighters arrived. He managed to escape into high grass near his home, but then watched in horror as the anti-balaka fighters cut the throats of his family members and others next to the bridge between Ben Zambé and Bodora. He told Human Rights Watch:

*[The attackers] were numerous, and they were armed with Kalashnikovs, guns, machetes, and knives. They caught all of my children. I managed to run away and hide in the tall grass. I saw them cut the throats of my children, one by one, with a knife. They passed the children to the one who had the knife, one by one.... After the children, they killed my wives, and then more people, people they had caught in the neighborhood. There were bodies everywhere, they left them there.*²²

²⁰ Ibid. Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Ouham-Bac, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

²² Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Bodora, Bossan-

²⁴ THEY CAME TO KILL

Among those killed were his two wives, Bali Gouro, 37, and Modari Modjolo, 37, and his 11 children and grandchild: Rouha, 25; Abou, 20; Minieko, 16, and her daughter Hawa, 6 months; Souleh, 15; Halima, 14; Mayro, 13; Seydou, 13; Biba, 10; Saaleh, 10, and Djouli, 8.²³ This witness appeared to be the sole survivor from this attack. He recognized some of the leaders of the anti-balaka as villagers from near his home. They included a Christian cattle raiser from Bondora who suffered the loss of all of his cattle by ex-Seleka forces and had vowed revenge.²⁴

After watching his family murdered, he hid in the bush for two days before seeking shelter with a wealthy Christian in a neighboring village whom he knew well. The Christian man told him he could stay with him. From the window of the house, this witness could see the activity of a nearby anti-balaka base:

*From the window of [my Christian friend’s] house, I could see the base of the anti-balaka, in a building covered with white tarps. I could see them come back in the evening with loads of meat, which they shared with all of the people in the village. They brought [abducted people] to their chief, who was sometimes in civilian clothes and sometimes in military clothes—they brought him [abducted] Muslims. Sometimes, I could hear their screams, and then nothing, and sometimes they let them live. But I couldn’t see how they killed them, because there were too many people around—however, I think they killed many people there in the five days I was hiding.*²⁵

On the sixth day of his hiding, ex-Seleka fighters arrived and forced the anti-balaka forces to flee the village.²⁶

VOTOVO

A Muslim cattle raiser, 24, resident of Votovo, told Human Rights Watch that dozens of anti-balaka fighters attacked the Muslim areas of his village of Votovo, located 15 kilometers south of Bossangoa, at about 5 a.m. on September 26:

I was at my home. I heard loud noises and gunfire outside. It was the anti-balaka of the Gbaya tribe, several dozen of them. They were speaking their language. They were armed with Kalashnikovs, machetes, and their

goa, November 3, 2013.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

*homemade hunting guns. They came on foot, and entered all of the houses. At my house, they looted my clothes, my luggage, and my kitchen utensils. Then they gathered all of us at the square of the village, and told us, “We will kill all the Muslims, and first we will kill all your livestock.” Then, they separated the [Muslim] men on one side, and the women and children on the other side.*²⁷

After separating the men from the women, about a dozen attackers overpowered the cattle raiser’s older brother, 27-year-old Amadou Hiroyi, and cut his throat with a knife, killing him. They then opened fire with their homemade guns on the rest of the Muslim men there. Two Muslim men and a Muslim boy were killed by the gunfire – Amadou Djibo, 20; Adam Bouba, 18; and Ade Djibo, 13. The rest fled for their lives.²⁸

A second resident of Votovo, 32, separately told Human Rights Watch:

*They took all of us [Muslims] to the village square and said, “We are going to kill you all.” I asked them, “Why?” Their chief said, “Who told you to talk? We are going to kill all the Mbororo because you are all Muslims. And we will kill all your livestock.” I watched them cut the throat of Amadou Hiroyi, and then they killed [shot] my two little brothers as we were running away – Amadou Djibo, 20, and Ade Djibo, 13.*²⁹

He and the other surviving men fled into the bush, but returned at night to see what had happened to their village. They found all of their homes burned, and all of their cattle slaughtered, with only the inedible heads remaining.³⁰ Twenty-one Muslim women and children who had been separated from the men were missing. None had been found at the time of Human Rights Watch’s visit in early November, nearly two months after the attack and were presumed dead by their relatives.³¹ The surviving

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Votovo, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013. His account of the attack was confirmed by several other Votovo residents interviewed by Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch interviews with residents of Votovo, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Votovo, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Votovo, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

³¹ The 21 missing include 17 children: Zakaria Barka, 7; Shaibou Bouba, 7; Halidou Barka, 5; Hamadou Seini, 8; Moussa Seini, 5; Abassi Bouba, 13; Kaltoumi Djibo, 16; Djouli Bouba, 10; Salma Bella, 17;

Muslim men spent five days hiding in the bush around the village before being rescued by ex-Seleka fighters led by General Ali, who had come from Bossangoa after receiving reports about the attack on the village.³²

BOSSANGOA

On December 5, anti-balaka forces mounted a major attack on Bossangoa itself, briefly seizing control of the town. During the attack, anti-balaka forces killed Muslim civilians in the Muslim Boro quarter of Bossangoa, killing at least 11 civilians with machetes and gunfire. Among the dead was Ousman Abacar, 26, a young Peuhl whom Human Rights Watch had taken to the hospital that same morning to obtain treatment for a gunshot wound he had received three weeks earlier during an anti-balaka attack on the cattle camp where he lived, north of Bossangoa. Ousman Abacar was unable to flee the anti-balaka attackers because of the wound, and was captured and killed by having his throat cut.³³ His mother, who had stayed behind to take care of him, was also killed.³⁴

Nine other Muslims lost their lives, including Khadija Iné, 35, the wife of the Muslim trader Gara Iné, and her brother Adei Abacar, 38, who were also caught and killed by having their throats cut near the house of the imam, where they had sought safety.³⁵

*It was a surprise attack, so everyone fled to the imam’s house for safety, and it is around there that so many were killed. The people who attacked included real FACA soldiers and Presidential Guards, armed with AK-47s and RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], and they were in uniform and wearing the red berets [of the former presidential guard].*³⁶

Djala Bouba, 13; Fadi Bouba, 10; Hawa Seini, 13, and her two sisters Hamina Seini, 4, and Fane Seini, 8 months; Fadi Baraka, 7; Kaltouma Baraka, 2; and Ade Djibo, 5. Four adult women are also missing: Lady Sankara, 50, and her two daughters Gueba Djibo, 25, and Djidja Djibo, 20; and Djidja Bouba, 30 (the wife of Adam Bouba, who was shot dead).

³² Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Votovo, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ousman Abacar, Bossangoa, December 5, 2013. Human Rights Watch interview with Boro resident, Bossangoa, December 6, 2013.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Boro resident, Bossangoa, December 6, 2013.

³⁶ Ibid.

The other dead from the incident included Qursi Abdulrahim, 50, trader; Ali Atahir, 45, trader; Jimey Atahir, 42, trader; Aishta Oumar, 38, a mother of three children; Nami Yawa, an Mbororo mother with four children; her sister Hawa Yama, an Mbororo mother with six children; and Hamidou “Seize-Dix-Sept,” a popular motorcycle taximan.³⁷

ATTACKS ON MBORORO CATTLE CAMPS

At the same time as the attacks on ex-Seleka outposts and bases and Muslim communities in Bir Zambé, Zeré, Ouham-Bac, and Koro M’Poko, anti-balaka forces also conducted attacks on Muslim-owned cattle camps run by Mbororo herders in the same regions, stealing thousands of heads of cattle and killing many of the Mbororo families who were guarding the cattle.

A Mbororo woman in her late thirties was at a cattle camp of some 500 cows located 13 kilometers from Bir Zambé when it was attacked by anti-balaka forces on September 6. The attackers included both lightly armed anti-balaka fighters and well-armed military defectors.³⁸ The attackers shot dead her husband, Abubaker Bouba; his second wife Adama Yahiya; this witness’s three children, Oumar, Zeituna, and Jambriila; and the five children of her co-wife, Abasi, Aisatu, Fadi, Rahmatu, and Adamour.³⁹ She herself was wounded with a bullet to the back of her head, and she lost consciousness during the attack. The owner of the cattle found her barely alive more than a week later, amid the decomposing remains of her family, and brought her to Bossangoa for medical treatment.⁴⁰ He told Human Rights Watch that anti-balaka forces killed six of the nine Mbororo guards, and stole 747 heads of cattle at the neighboring cattle camp belonging to his brother Nazal Mohammed. All 500 of his cattle had been stolen, he lamented.⁴¹

El-Nour Adim, 51, a wealthy Muslim businessman, heard about the attacks on the camps and asked ex-Seleka

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Hadija Oumar, Bossangoa, October 31, 2013; Human Rights Watch interview with Daoud Mohammed, Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013. This woman, who was still recovering from a gunshot wound to the head, was too weak to recount the ages of the dead during the interview with Human Rights Watch.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Beldo Ibrahim holds her daughter who survived an attack with machetes and knives by anti-balaka militias, who killed her husband and three boys, ages 3, 10, and 14. November 2, 2013.
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forces to escort him to his cattle camp near Bir Zambé to check. On the road, the convoy was ambushed by the anti-balaka, and El-Nour Adim and two of the seven ex-Seleka fighters accompanying him were killed in the attack.⁴² When Adim’s younger brother finally managed to reach the camp site nearly a month later, he found the skeletal remains of all 12 Mbororo family members: five adult Mbororo and their seven children who had been guarding the camp. The 406 head of cattle were all missing.⁴³

A Mbororo woman, 32, was with 10 other Mbororo at the cattle camp of a Muslim businessman, Gara Iné, who lost his wife and brother-in-law during the December 5 anti-balaka attack on Bossangoa (see above). She was coming back to the cattle camp at about 4 p.m. on September 6 from gathering food, when the camp came under attack from a large group of anti-balaka fighters: “The anti-balaka were so many, like a whole village of them.”⁴⁴ The anti-balaka fighters surprised and captured all 11 Mbororo in the camp and proceeded to separate the men from the women, before killing the men. She told Human Rights Watch:

They put us on the ground, and then said they would kill the males only. They told us to remove our shoes. There were a lot of them [anti-balaka], and then they pushed the four males down and cut their throats in front of us. One was my husband, Yaya Douka. The others were just children: Bouba Keriyo, 14, Tahirou Keriyo, 10, and Khalidou Ngadjo, 3. Even the children had their throats cut. My daughter Habiba, 3, was hit on her head with a machete, and cut all over her back with knives—she was in her father’s hands so they thought she was a boy.⁴⁵

An Mbororo woman in her forties who was the mother of the 3-year-old boy killed in the attack, Halaidu Ndajo,

⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013; Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

confirmed the details of the incident in a separate interview with Human Rights Watch. She told Human Rights Watch:

There were lots of attackers. They had AK-47s as well as machetes and homemade rifles. Some of them were in military uniforms. They came and trapped me with my child. They killed my boy and three others—they had all four captive, and executed them one by one, next to the river. They said it was the Muslims who chased away Bozizé, and so now all the Muslims will suffer until the end. They killed my child in front of me.

Then the night came, and some of them said they wouldn’t kill the women and so they let us go. We left to hide in the bush. But then there was an argument, and some said they had to kill us as well. So they came to search for us, but we stayed hidden, me and my sister.⁴⁶

Qursi Mohammad, a Muslim trader, 46, stayed with his 156 cattle at a camp near Zéré, together with an Mbororo cattle herder. On September 7, anti-balaka fighters attacked the camp and shot dead Qursi and his Mbororo cattle herder and stole the cattle. The next day, ex-Seleka forces and Muslim traders from Bossangoa found the two bodies.⁴⁷ According to the owner, an adjacent cattle camp housing 176 head of cattle was looted at the same time, and the Mbororo herder was also shot dead.⁴⁸

Human Rights Watch found many more similar cases of Muslim-owned cattle camps around Bossangoa that were attacked by anti-balaka elements in September 2013, including additional cases where Mbororo herders at the camps were killed. The Muslim business community of Bossangoa prepared a list of 21 Muslim-owned cattle camps that were raided, counting nearly 5,000 heads of cattle looted, a massive financial, social, and cultural loss for this largely nomadic community.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 2, 2013.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013. The witness did not know the name of the Mbororo cattle herder who had been killed in the incident.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, October 31, 2013.

⁴⁹ List provided to Human Rights Watch, November 1, 2013.

III. EX-SELEKA ABUSES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

The September attacks by the anti-balaka on ex-Seleka forces in the Bossangoa region resulted in significant ex-Seleka losses. Many of their smaller outposts and bases in places such as Ouham-Bac, Zéré, Bowali, and Bir Zambé were quickly overrun by the more numerous anti-balaka forces. As a result, the ex-Seleka abandoned most of the countryside around Bossangoa and concentrated their remaining fighters in the main population center of Bossangoa.

Following these setbacks, ex-Seleka forces responded by carrying out deadly attacks on the villages where the attacks had occurred and burning down some villages. Anti-balaka forces tried to protect Christian communities and their own militias from ex-Seleka retaliation. The anti-balaka, for example, destroyed bridges on the roads around Bossangoa, effectively preventing ex-Seleka movement there.

Ex-Seleka forces have continued to instill fear in areas by conducting surprise attacks targeting small groups of Christians. There are 40,000 Christians who have fled the countryside and sought out the relative safety of the Catholic church in Bossangoa, where they live in cramped and overcrowded conditions. Any travel outside the camp to other parts of the city or to their fields, however, is dangerous, especially for men.

Attacks on Christians in Bossangoa have taken place with complete impunity and with the consent, and in some cases direct participation, of the highest-ranking ex-Seleka commanders in Bossangoa. On November 18, at about 5 p.m., ex-Seleka forces detained seven Christian farmers near the airport in Bossangoa as they attempted to return from a day’s work in their fields. The men were tied up and brought to the camp of General Yaya, the ex-Seleka commander of Bossangoa.⁵⁰ According to a survivor, the tied-up men were brought before General Yaya and his then-deputy commander, Colonel Saleh, and about a dozen other senior commanders, and presented as captured anti-balaka fighters. The deputy commander, Colonel Saleh, in the presence of General

⁵⁰ General Yaya was killed on December 4 during an attack by anti-balaka in Bangui.

Yaya personally ordered his men to “throw them in the river.”⁵¹ General Yaya was killed in the December 5 fighting in Bangui, and his former deputy Colonel Saleh is now the commander of ex-Seleka in Bossangoa.

One of the survivors told Human Rights Watch:

At 3 a.m. they came with a vehicle. They tied us up even tighter and threw us into the vehicle, put a tarp over us, and took us to their main base, next to the UNICEF compound. At the base, they showed us to Colonel Saleh who came to see us. He authorized them to take us to the river and kill us. They spoke among themselves in Arabic, which I understood a bit. General Yaya was there as well, with Colonel Saleh.... The meeting to decide our fate took some 25 minutes. It was starting to become light soon, so they were in a hurry.⁵²

The ex-Seleka fighters took the bound men to the Ouham River and threw two into the river near the radio station, but managed to free themselves and swim to safety after the ex-Seleka fighters left. The five other bound men were taken by car to the main bridge over the Ouham River, and thrown into the swift-moving current.

One of the survivors told Human Rights Watch:

They took us to the bridge over the Ouham River. They took out three of us and began to beat them. Then they tied them up, and they bashed them on the concrete before throwing them into the river. Then they took the fourth person; they beat him until he was bleeding from his ears and nose. They were busy tying him up when he moved a bit, so they figured he was still too conscious to drown. They lifted him up and threw him down on the cement to stun him. Then they threw him into the river.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], November 28, 2013.

⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with survivor of drowning incident [name withheld], December 5, 2013. Human Rights Watch conducted in-depth interviews with all three of the survivors.

I was the fifth person, the last one. They began to beat me on the head and body with their rifle butts, and my whole face was bloody. They thought I was unconscious. They had no more rope, so they tied me up with my pants and threw me into the river. They first threw me down on the cement floor and then rolled me into the river. I rose to the surface and could see they were following me with their rifles. I went under three times and then my pants came loose and I managed to swim to the shore.⁵³

On November 26, local humanitarian workers found the bodies of the four bound men on the banks of the river.⁵⁴

ATTACKS INSIDE BOSSANGOYA

On September 10, Donacien Ndakuzu, a driver's assistant, went to the Bossangoa bus station to watch over his employer's vehicle, which was parked there. According to Ndakuzu's wife, who spoke to those who witnessed the incident, three ex-Seleka fighters approached him at the station and demanded that he give them fuel from the vehicle. Ndakuzu explained to the ex-Seleka the vehicle had no fuel, but they threatened to kill him if he did not produce any. They then fired three rounds at him, killing him, and then walked back to their base, leaving his body behind.⁵⁵

On the morning of September 14, Nesta Ngaipo, 38, a butcher, was on his way to the Bossangoa market with two Muslim helpers, carrying the meat of a cow he had just butchered. On the way they were stopped by three ex-Seleka fighters who accused Ngaipo of being with the anti-balaka. The ex-Seleka let the two Muslim helpers go, but Ngaipo disappeared and is believed by his wife and his employees to have been killed by them.⁵⁶ On September 15, a resident of Bossangoa, 35, was washing her clothes in the Ouham River in Bossangoa with her husband and her infant, when five ex-Seleka fighters approached them. She told Human Rights Watch how the ex-Seleka fighters opened fire on them, killing her husband while he was holding their baby in his hands:

I was busy washing our clothes in the river, and my husband was holding our baby. He told me, "Hurry, the Seleka are coming!" It was already too late. They fired a first shot that hit my girl in the arm, and then a second one that just brushed its head. My husband raised our daughter above his head to show he was carrying a child, and they fired again at him, hitting him in the stomach. ... I acted as if I was dead. They wanted to come and check on me, but two of the Seleka said not to bother. I had to remain still for several hours, because they were right above me. My little girl was bleeding heavily and crying. Finally, I came out, and they allowed me to take her to the hospital.⁵⁷

On September 17, clashes broke out inside Bossangoa between ex-Seleka and anti-balaka fighters, catching many residents in the town by surprise and causing many to flee. During the clashes, indiscriminate gunfire occurred in many districts of Bossangoa, killing an unknown number of people. Several people told Human Rights Watch that ex-Seleka fighters responded to the anti-balaka attack on their Bossangoa positions by firing at civilians.

In the Sembe neighborhood, ex-Seleka fighters shooting indiscriminately killed Ester Kandona, 35, who was eight-months pregnant, as she was working in their fields with her husband.⁵⁸ "Seleka fighters were firing in all directions, and one of the bullets hit and killed her [and the fetus]," Kandona's sister-in-law told Human Rights Watch, "We fled to the church camp the same day."⁵⁹

A resident of Bossangoa, 23, was also in the Sembe neighborhood of Bossangoa when ex-Seleka forces started firing. She hid inside her home for a while and then fled to the church camp. Her brother Alphonse Mondoka, 53, stayed inside his home, hiding under his bed. The next morning, Justine found Alphonse's dead body in front of his house with a gunshot wound in his back.⁶⁰

Another resident of Bossangoa, 65, was at his home with a relative named Jeannot on September 17 when gunfire broke out in their Bossangoa neighborhood of Tipoyeur.



A burned Pentecostal church in Zéré. Hundreds of Christian and Muslim homes and places of worship were destroyed in the town during a series of attacks by both ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces. November 4, 2013. © 2013 Marcus Bleasdale/VII for Human Rights Watch

They hid inside for most of the day. He told Human Rights Watch that "around 5 p.m., when the Muslims [ex-Seleka] became tired of shooting, we left to seek refuge at the church."⁶¹ As they fled, the two men were separated, and he heard a gunshot ring out behind him. "Jeannot never arrived at the church camp. It was too dangerous for men to return to the neighborhood, but the women went back and found his body. They asked the Red Cross and the FOMAC [African Union] troops to bury him."⁶²

At about 5 p.m. on September 17, Germain Ngaissonna, 37, a father of eight, attempted to return to Bossangoa from his field outside town, believing the fighting had died down. As he crossed the main bridge into Bossangoa, ex-Seleka fighters demanded that he and three other men stop. While these three managed to run away, the ex-Seleka fighters apprehended Ngaissonna on the bridge and fatally stabbed him.⁶³ By nightfall, five men had been stabbed to death by the ex-Seleka fighters on the bridge. The next day, four of the bodies were

thrown in the Ouham River. FOMAC troops, at his wife's request, recovered Ngaissonna's body.⁶⁴

On November 1, a Christian man, 23, went to look for his missing pigs near the Bossangoa school, where displaced Muslims were living. At the school, a Muslim woman started yelling at him, and then asked the ex-Seleka fighters at the adjoining checkpoint to kill him, saying that his parents were anti-balaka. The ex-Seleka fighters began beating him with their rifle butts, and then brought a knife to cut his throat. He managed to break free and run off, narrowly missing being shot by the ex-Seleka fighters as he made his escape. The entire incident took place in broad daylight, just 100 meters away from a team of foreign journalists staying at the main guesthouse in Bossangoa housing UN and humanitarian workers.⁶⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Sembe neighborhood in Bossangoa, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Tipoyeur neighborhood in Bossangoa, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with [name withheld], Bossangoa,

On October 24, Thierry Demokossai, 40, was working with his neighbors in their fields in the Bali neighborhood of Bossangoa. His wife, 30, recounted to Human Rights Watch what happened when a group of ex-Seleka fighters came to the area at about 3 p.m.:

*The Seleka came on foot, there were four of them. They hid in the bushes and then opened fire on us. We were six in the field, and three were killed: my husband, and two of his neighbors. There was no argument or anything. They just came out of the bushes where they were hiding and opened fire on us without any warning. My husband was shot in the back of the head, and the bullet came out the front, destroying his whole face.*⁶⁶

Pregnant at the time of her husband's death, she gave birth to a baby boy the next day.⁶⁷

At about 10 a.m. on October 8, a group of ex-Seleka fighters went house-to-house through the Bonjili district of Bossangoa, killing and burning. A resident of the Bonjili district, 25, told Human Rights Watch that when the ex-Seleka approached her house, her husband, Alfred Fenjiro, 32, tried to hide under their bed, while she ran out of the house. Hiding nearby, she watched as the ex-Seleka fighters killed him:

Three Seleka fighters came into the house, and I ran out into the bush while my husband remained in the house. They killed him with knives and then burned the house. I saw it with my own eyes, and I could hear the screams of my husband inside.

Two other men from Bonjili were similarly stabbed to death, she also recounted:

They killed three men that morning in Bonjili. This was the first time the Seleka came to our neighborhood, and they came to kill. I don't know why—there was no anti-balaka in our area.

She went back to Bonjili the next day and found her husband's body inside their burned home, with stab wounds to the stomach, back, and neck.⁶⁸

November 1, 2013; Human Rights Watch interview with foreign journalist who witnessed incident, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Bali neighborhood in Bossangoa, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of the Bonjili district

ATTACKS OUTSIDE BOSSANGOA

In late September or early October, ex-Seleka forces arrived in the village of Bogouna, 18 kilometers northeast of Bossangoa.⁶⁹ As soon as they arrived, at about 3 p.m., they fired into the air to force the villagers to flee, and then began burning the homes in the village.⁷⁰ When the villagers returned after the attack, they found the body of Léon Ouedan, 64, in front of his home with a gunshot wound to his back.⁷¹

On October 22, Valentin Nambobona, 46, the village chief of Tamkouru village, was working in his fields with his two wives. At about 11 a.m., a group of armed Muslim cattle herders moved their cows through the field. His wives fled, but Nambobona tried to retrieve his bicycle. The wives heard three gunshots from their hiding place, and when they returned to the field a few hours later, they found Nambobona's body with a gunshot wound to the head. As a result of the killing of the village chief, the entire village fled their homes for fear of more attacks.⁷²

On October 10, four vehicles of ex-Seleka fighters from Bossangoa travelled down the road to Ouham-Bac, where an ex-Seleka base as well as local Muslim residents had been attacked and killed in early September (see above). As they drove towards Ouham-Bac, the ex-Seleka fighters repeatedly fired at fleeing civilians along the road. At the village of Wikamo, the passing ex-Seleka fighters shot dead Samuel Denamjora, 12, and three other villagers.⁷³ After the villagers had fled Wikamo, the ex-Seleka fighters left their vehicles and looted the local hospital and school, emptying both buildings. They then proceeded to burn down the entire village of Wikamo.⁷⁴

As the ex-Seleka fighters proceeded towards Ouham-Bac, they passed the home of Nicole Faranganda, 34, who had given birth to a baby girl the day before. Weakened from

of Bossangoa, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁶⁹ The witness did not recall the exact date of the attack, estimating that it had occurred 'three weeks or one month' before she was interviewed on November 3. However, according to satellite fire detection data, several villages on the same road were burned on September 27, slightly more than one month before the witness was interviewed by Human Rights Watch.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Bogouna, Bossangoa, November 3, 2013.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Tamkouru, Bossangoa, November 1, 2013.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Wikamo, Wikamo, November 3, 2013.

⁷⁴ Ibid.; Human Rights Watch interview with Eric Zalo, Wikamo, November 3, 2013.



A Christian man displaced by the fighting between ex-Seleka forces and anti-balaka militias takes shelter on the grounds of the Catholic church in Bossangoa. November 2, 2013.
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labor, Faranganda was slow in fleeing from the ex-Seleka fighters. They shot her dead just outside her house.⁷⁵

When the ex-Seleka fighters reached Ouham-Bac, they quickly emerged from their vehicles and tried to trap as many of the surprised residents as possible, before killing them.⁷⁶ Jean-Marie Sendamanou, 50, was shot dead in front of his wife, Philomene, before she was also shot and killed.⁷⁷ Marceline Gandaboye, 35, was shot dead as she fled with her baby tied to her back.⁷⁸ Hiller Redebonna, 55, was fatally shot in front of his house.⁷⁹ Gervais Berofi, 28, was unable to flee because he had lost a leg in an accident; he was shot dead.⁸⁰ Gaston Sanbogai, 22, was blind and tried to hide in the high grass next to his hut; the ex-Seleka fighters found him, pulled him out, and executed him.⁸¹ Alice Gandako, 60, the wife of the mayor

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Wikamo (mother of victim Nicole Faraganda), Wikamo, November 3, 2013.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with residents of Ouham-Bac, Ouham-Bac, November 3, 2013.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

of Ouham-Bac, was executed in front of her home.⁸² Marie Konamina, 50, and a youth nicknamed Pasteur, 28, were shot dead as they fled. Two children and an adult drowned in the Ouham River as they fled the attackers in panic: Martial Redebonna, 8, Diane Fokean, 2, and Diane's father Armand Fokean, 38, who jumped in after her to try and save her.⁸³

The villagers from Ouham-Bac said the ex-Seleka forces who attacked them on October 10 were accompanied by at least three Muslim traders from Ouham-Bac, whom they identified by name to Human Rights Watch. The traders pointed out to the ex-Seleka fighters which homes to burn, using their in-depth knowledge of the village.⁸⁴ The ex-Seleka fighters burned 35 homes in Ouham-Bac, before another group of ex-Seleka fighters from Bozoum arrived and apparently convinced the group from Bossangoa to withdraw.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Ouham-Bac (father of victim Martial Redebonna), Ouham-Bac, November 3, 2013.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. The Bozoum ex-Seleka fighters had been attending a meeting with local villagers at a location not far away from Ouham-Bac at the time

WIKAMO

VILLAGE COORDINATES: 6.445N, 17.232E

Satellite Image Date: December 4, 2013



On October 10, 2013, four vehicles of ex-Seleka fighters drove from Bossangoa to Ouham-Bac where an ex-Seleka base as well as local Muslim residents had been attacked and killed in early September. As they drove towards Ouham-Bac, the ex-Seleka fighters repeatedly fired at fleeing civilians along the road. In the village of Wikamo, ex-Seleka fighters shot dead four village residents,

looted the local hospital and school, and then proceeded to systematically burn the village. A total of 198 buildings, representing 71% of the village, were destroyed by fire based on an analysis of satellite imagery recorded on the morning of December 4, 2013. Destroyed buildings visible in the image above are circled in red.

 DESTROYED BUILDINGS



(left) Detailed view of destruction in Zéré: Typically, arson attacks burn away thatched rooftops leaving loadbearing walls intact.

Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch;
Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A;
Image Copyright: CNES 2013;
Source: Astrium.

IV. HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE: “LIVING AND DYING LIKE ANIMALS”

At least 40,000 people are living in make-shift shelters on the grounds of the Catholic church in Bossangoa. The human rights abuses committed by ex-Seleka forces and anti-balaka militias have caused massive displacement of civilians in the area. November 3, 2013.
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THE DISPLACEMENT CRISIS

The human rights abuses committed by ex-Seleka forces and anti-balaka militias in northern Central African Republic have resulted in massive destruction and displacement in the area, causing a humanitarian catastrophe. Some 450,000 people have been forced to flee their homes because of the violence, including 170,000 in Ouham province alone.⁸⁶

Of those displaced in Ouham province, some 40,000 Christians have sought refuge in extremely crowded conditions around the Catholic church in Bossangoa, while some 4,000 displaced Muslims are sheltering on the opposite side of Bossangoa at the Ecole Liberté and nearby government buildings.

The displacement crisis is a direct result of the human rights abuses committed primarily by ex-Seleka fighters. Their modus operandi has been to attack villages by arriving at high speed in 4x4 vehicles, immediately begin shooting at the fleeing population, and then setting entire villages on fire. Most villages in the Central African Republic are very close to the main roads, making them very vulnerable to such surprise attacks, a tactic previously used by the Presidential Guard of then-president Bozizé during counterinsurgency operations.⁸⁷

The ex-Seleka's arson attacks have resulted in the burning of countless villages and towns across northern Central African Republic, particularly in Ouham and Ouham-Pendé provinces. Using site visits and satellite imagery analysis, Human Rights Watch has documented arson attacks on vast stretches of villages over the entire conflict-affected region, demonstrating both their systematic and widespread nature.⁸⁸

of the attack.

⁸⁶ According to the UN estimates, 394,979 persons were internally displaced because of the conflict as of September 30, 2013, and another 64,717 new refugees from Central African Republic had fled to neighboring countries. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Central African Republic: Situation Report No. 30 (as of 8 November 2013, available at https://car.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/Situation%20Report%2030_EN.pdf).

⁸⁷ See Human Rights Watch, Central African Republic – State of Anarchy Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians, September 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/09/14/state-anarchy>.

⁸⁸ Josh Lyons, “What a War Crime Looks Like From Space” Human Rights Watch dispatch, November 26, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/26/dispatches->



BOSSANGOA

(CAMP COORDINATES: 6.496N, 17.449E)

Satellite Image Date: December 4, 2013



Since July 2013, several hundred displaced Muslim civilians sought shelter within the main buildings of a local school (Ecole Liberté) in the Muslim Boro quarter of Bossangoa. A large-scale attack by Christian anti-balaka fighters in Bossangoa on December 5, 2013 left 11 residents dead and multiple buildings destroyed. The number of displaced in Boro dramatically increased when over 7,000 local Muslims residents sought emergency shelter and protection at the school which was heavily protected by African Union troops and the ex-Seleka fighters at the time.

Satellite Image Date: December 12, 2013



Satellite imagery recorded on the mornings of December 4 and 12, 2013, captures the rapid expansion of the Ecole Liberté camp for over 7,000 displaced Muslims civilians in the Boro quarter of Bossangoa.

Damage Analysis: Human Rights Watch;
Satellite Sensor: Pléiades-1A;
Image Copyright: CNES 2013;
Source: Astrium.

THE HEALTH CRISIS

Tens of thousands of displaced people have sought shelter in larger population centers, such as Bossangoa, where there are some very basic medical facilities in place, as well as sanitary measures and safe water supplies aimed at preventing the outbreak of communicable diseases. Even in these larger population centers, however, many medical needs are unmet. For example, Human Rights Watch documented cases in Bossangoa's main camp for internally displaced persons at the Catholic church where teenage girls gave birth unassisted, endangering their lives and those of their babies.

An even more severe health crisis is unfolding outside the main population centers in the Central African Republic, in the rural countryside where tens of thousands have fled their burned-out or abandoned villages and are living in rudimentary shelters, often close to their rural fields. Many of these villagers live too far away from the main population centers to relocate there, feel unsafe passing through Seleka checkpoints, or prefer to remain close to their fields where food is available.

Human Rights Watch found that in September, Bossangoa-based ex-Seleka forces had systematically looted and destroyed the vitally important medical centers and pharmacies in secondary population centers around Bossangoa, particularly in Ndjo, Ouham-Bac, and Zéré. These medical centers and pharmacies, located in major trading centers, serve the surrounding villages, so their looting affects health care in the entire area.

In the abandoned market and gold-mining town of Ndjo, Human Rights Watch asked some displaced people to take its research team to their shelters in the bush. The team had to walk for about four kilometers, crossing a river, to reach the area where about 14,000 displaced persons had sought shelter in small improvised shelters. The first person encountered was Raphaël Newane, 55, a village chief from Ndjo, who showed Human Rights Watch the graves of his two grandchildren who, he said, had died from malaria just one week earlier: Fredianne Mobene, 9 months, and Aurélie Newane, 6 months.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ what-war-crime-looks-space.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafel Newane, Ndjo, November

Human Rights Watch also met with a nurse from the Ndjo medical center, 32, who had just lost his sister Delphine Yamini, 37, to malaria. He showed Human Rights Watch his medical case—it contained a single bandage, and some medical tools he had managed to save from the destroyed clinic. He told Human Rights Watch:

My sister died just 48 hours ago. She had a bad case of malaria, and anemia. There was nothing I could do. We live and die like animals here. The effectiveness of a nurse like me depends on our access to medications.... The biggest problem is malaria. We have five or six deaths a week in the area. A mother came to me sick with malaria just a few minutes before you arrived, and I had to send her away....

All of these people dying in the bush because of health problems, it started after the Seleka looted the clinic and the pharmacy on September 16. They came in four vehicles. We heard their gunshots and fled into the bush. On the 17th, we went with the village chief to look at the damage. We found one boy, Silas Dewan, 14, shot dead from bullets. We found nothing left at our clinic. They took everything—they took even the mattresses, but the biggest loss for us was the medications they looted. Before that day, I had enough medicines to treat the people.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ 5, 2013.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with a resident of Ndjo, Ndjo, November 5, 2013.



Raphaël Newane, a village chief from Ndjo, stands in front of the graves of his two grandchildren, who died from malaria a week before this photo was taken. November 5, 2013
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THE EDUCATION CRISIS

On most of the blackboards in the abandoned schools visited by Human Rights Watch in October 2013 around Bossangoa, the date of the last lesson is almost invariably in March—the month Seleka took power in Bangui. Since March 2013, almost the entire school-age population in this region has been out of school. Nationally, more than 70 percent of school-age children—at least 450,000 children—are currently out of school, an education crisis of immense proportions.⁹¹ Even in large population centers like Bossangoa, Human Rights Watch found that schools are not operating, and are often occupied by displaced persons in need of shelter. The Ecole Liberté in Bossangoa, for example, currently houses some 4,000 displaced Muslims in its classrooms.

While many schools are closed because the villages in which they are situated have been burned or abandoned as a result of the fighting, the schools visited by Human Rights Watch in Ndjo, Zéré, and Ouham-Bac had been systematically looted of their books and other essential supplies by ex-Seleka fighters. A September 2013 inter-agency assessment of schools in Central African Republic found that nationwide, 64 percent of all schools had been extensively looted (by both armed groups and civilians), a figure that rose to more than 90 percent in two of the provinces assessed.⁹² Among the items commonly found looted or destroyed are the metal roofs of the schools, textbooks, desks, canteen equipment, and the schools' official records.⁹³

⁹¹ For a detailed assessment, see UN Interagency Education Cluster, “A Step Back: The Impact of the Recent Crisis on Education in the Central African Republic,” September 2013, available at <https://car.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/EC%20CAR%20-%20Impact%20crisis%20on%20education%20-%20Evaluation%20Report%20EN.pdf>. The assessment was done before renewed fighting broke out in Ouham, Ouham-Pendé, and other provinces, so the actual number of students out of school at the moment is probably even higher than the 70 percent estimated in the assessment report.

⁹² “A Step Back,” p. 20.

⁹³ Ibid.

A school in Bossangoa that was operating until March 2013, when the Seleka took power in Bangui. Almost the entire school-age population in this region has been out of school since March. The school is now used as a shelter for people displaced by the fighting between ex-Seleka and anti-balaka forces. November 3, 2013.

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Anti-balaka fighters have recruited and armed children in villages surrounding Bossangoa. November 3, 2013.
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