

INVISIBLE CHILDREN

ESCALATING VIOLENCE IN EASTERN CAR POSES GRAVE THREAT TO CIVILIANS | 12 JUNE 2017

Armed groups have killed 220 civilians and abducted 96 others in eastern Central African Republic (CAR) since January 2017, while also killing eight peacekeepers from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA). Leadership from the UN Security Council and U.S. government is needed to expand community-based early warning, resilience, and social cohesion programs in eastern CAR and ensure MINUSCA more effectively implements its protection of civilians mandate.

I. OVERVIEW OF ESCALATING ARMED GROUP ACTIVITY SINCE JANUARY 2017

Armed group violence has escalated sharply in eastern CAR¹ in recent weeks, particularly in Mbomou and Haute Kotto prefectures. In May alone, ex-Seleka forces and local “self-defense” militias (commonly referred to as anti-balaka) killed 132 civilians in the towns of Bangassou and Bria. In neighboring Haut Mbomou prefecture, Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) combatants have abducted 51 civilians so far in 2017.² Armed groups also remain active in neighboring areas of northern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, periodically crossing into eastern CAR and contributing to frequent flows of refugees between the three countries.

This violence comes on the heels of the decision in April 2017 by the United States (U.S.) and Uganda to begin withdrawing forces deployed in eastern CAR that have been conducting operations against the LRA.³ Ugandan troops were deployed to pursue the LRA as part of the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF), which was re-authorized by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) in May 2017, despite the announcement of the Ugandan withdrawal. Ugandan and U.S. troops in eastern CAR were tasked with pursuing the LRA, but their deployments also played a key role in preventing the expansion of ex-Seleka and self-defense (anti-balaka) armed groups into Haut Mbomou and eastern Mbomou.⁴

Violence involving ex-Seleka and self-defense (anti-balaka) militias in eastern CAR

On November 21, 2016, simmering tensions between two ex-Seleka factions, the Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) and the Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique (UPC), escalated into clashes that left dozens of civilians and combatants killed or wounded in Bria, the capital of Haute Kotto prefecture. In February 2017, MINUSCA forced UPC and FPRC combatants away from the Bambari area in neighboring Ouaka prefecture, leading to a higher concentration of ex-Seleka fighters in Haute Kotto and areas of Mbomou prefecture previously stabilized by Ugandan troops. Fighting involving ex-Seleka and self-defense (anti-balaka) forces erupted in the Mbomou towns of Bakouma and Nzako from March 20–21, killing 20 people and displacing hundreds more. Women and children have been particularly vulnerable to recent violence, exemplified by an April 11 incident in nearby Fode in which a self-defense militia attacked a group from the minority Peuhl community, killing a woman and four-year-old child. From April 25–27, clashes involving self-defense (anti-balaka) militias, UPC fighters, and Peuhls along the Bangassou–Rafai road killed 11 civilians.

On May 12–13, suspected self-defense (anti-balaka) fighters attacked the town of Bangassou in Mbomou, targeting the MINUSCA base and the predominantly Muslim neighborhood of Tokoyo. At least 115 civilians were killed during the incident. Thousands of civilians fled across the border into DRC’s Bas Uele province, a remote area that has recently experienced cases of Ebola virus disease. From May 16–18, clashes in Bria involving ex-Seleka and self-defense (anti-balaka) fighters killed 17 civilians and displaced 20,000 more. UPC and self-defense (anti-balaka) fighters also clashed on June 6 in Nzako, leading to the deaths of at least 18 civilians, the destruction of homes, and displacement of civilians.

¹ “Eastern CAR” does not have a determined geographical definition. For the purposes of this report, it refers to the prefectures of Haute Kotto, Mbomou, and Haut Mbomou, all areas where Invisible Children implements community-based protection programs.

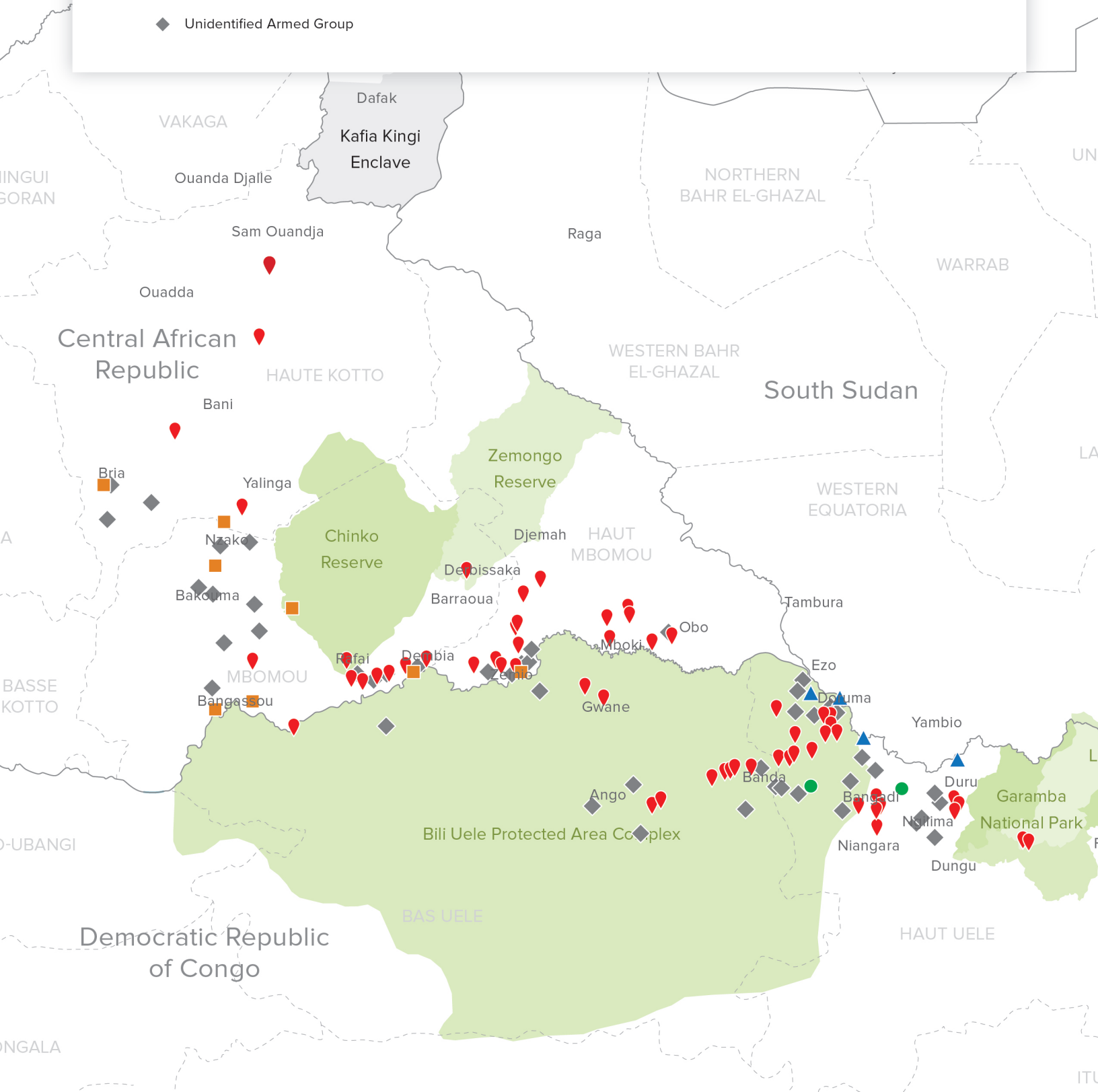
² Unless otherwise noted, all statistics concerning armed group attacks, abductions, killings, force capacity, and returnees are attributable to the LRA Crisis Tracker, a project of Invisible Children. Data can be accessed at <http://www.lracrisistracker.com/>. All LRA Crisis Tracker statistics in this report are accurate as of 10 June 2017.

³ The U.S. is also withdrawing Special Forces advisers deployed in LRA-affected areas of South Sudan and DRC.

⁴ Ugandan troops have also been accused of sexual abuse and exploitation in eastern CAR, particularly in the town of Obo, where they have been deployed since 2009. See Human Rights Watch, “Central African Republic: Ugandan Troops Harm Women, Girls,” 15 May 2017.

Map — Attacks on civilians in eastern CAR and northeastern DRC since January 2017

- 📍 LRA
- Poachers
- Self-defense militia (anti-balaka) and/or ex-Seleka
- ▲ South Sudanese militia
- ◆ Unidentified Armed Group



Targeting of humanitarian and MINUSCA personnel in eastern CAR

Armed groups have also become more bold in attacking humanitarian and MINUSCA personnel traveling along the Bangassou–Obo road in Mbomou and Haut Mbomou prefectures in 2017. On January 3, an unidentified armed group ambushed a MINUSCA convoy, killing two Moroccan peacekeepers. On May 8, self-defense (anti-balaka) fighters killed five MINUSCA peacekeepers and injured eight others at a checkpoint east of Bangassou. Armed groups have also ambushed humanitarian vehicles on two occasions, including a February 10 attack on a convoy carrying food destined for South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Obo, the capital of Haut Mbomou prefecture.

LRA abducts 210 civilians in eastern CAR and northeastern DRC

LRA forces continue to attack communities in the region, abducting 78 civilians in eastern CAR and 132 in northeastern DRC since January 2017. Though a majority of abductees were adults who were quickly released, even short-term captivity in the LRA can be a traumatic experience. LRA forces also exacerbate food insecurity, looting critical food stores and household possessions and leaving community members fearful of carrying out livelihood activities such as farming and herding cattle. Obo and other Central African towns that have hosted U.S. and AU-RTF troops or received LRA defectors are also at risk from retaliatory attacks by LRA forces once the U.S. and AU-RTF withdrawal is complete. In the communique re-authorizing the AU-RTF, the AU PSC noted that “the LRA has not yet been eliminated and still maintains the potential to rejuvenate itself, particularly if the security vacuum following the withdrawal of the Ugandan People’s Defence Forces (UPDF) and the U.S. Special Forces is not urgently filled.”⁵

Spillover of South Sudan conflict into eastern CAR and northeastern DRC

The escalation of fighting between South Sudanese armed groups and the South Sudanese military (SPLA) in Western Equatoria State since 2015 has forced almost 4,000 South Sudanese to take refuge in Obo and other Central African towns, while also slowing the movement of commercial goods into southeast CAR that are vital to the local economy. Thousands more South Sudanese have fled into DRC’s Haut Uele province, which borders southeastern CAR. South Sudanese armed men, some linked to Alfred Fatuyo’s rebel militia, have crossed into Haut Uele to attack refugees and Congolese civilians. South Sudanese armed groups have committed at least eight attacks since November 2016 near the Congolese towns of Doruma and Duru, and Fatuyo’s forces may be responsible for eight additional attacks near Doruma since then that have been attributed to unidentified armed groups.

Attacks by armed poachers near DRC’s Garamba National Park

Armed actors frequently move from eastern CAR into DRC to poach elephants in Garamba National Park, often attacking civilians as they do so. On January 11, a group of armed poachers in possession of illicit ivory abducted and executed a Congolese man and his son west of Garamba. The perpetrators were reportedly from the Uda pastoralist group, which frequently crosses the border between eastern CAR and northern DRC. LRA attack patterns in DRC in May 2017 strongly indicated that a group of LRA moved from CAR into DRC toward Garamba, possibly to resume elephant poaching. In recent years, the presence of LRA groups poaching in Garamba has been strongly correlated with increased attacks on civilians in communities surrounding the park, particularly Kiliwa, Kpaika, and Faradje.

⁵ See AU PSC, “Communique of the 685th PSC meeting on the renewal of the mandate of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord’s Resistance Army (RCLRA),” 19 May 2017.

II. THE ROOTS OF THE RECENT ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN EASTERN CAR

The history of armed group activity in eastern CAR provides important context regarding the recent escalation of violence there, highlighting the existence of long-standing sectarian fault lines and the need for sustained efforts to protect civilians from armed groups and promote social cohesion between different demographic groups. Since 2010, Invisible Children has compiled data and developed analysis on armed group activity in eastern CAR and neighboring areas of DRC and South Sudan through its community-based protection programs, which include support to local early warning systems and training for local peace committees, and through the LRA Crisis Tracker database and mapping platform. Our data and analysis demonstrate how armed groups are both fed by and contribute to broader sectarian tensions, creating a difficult environment for local civil society leaders, MINUSCA, humanitarians, and other protection stakeholders to operate. Our data also demonstrates that women, youth, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable populations are especially at risk from armed groups in eastern CAR.

Sectarian tensions and the rise of armed groups

Eastern CAR is a patchwork of diverse demographic groups, in which civilians embody complex identities interwoven with ethnic, religious, and livelihood affiliations. Muslim-majority groups include transhumant Peuhl pastoralists, as well as transhumant pastoralists and traders from Chad and Sudan. Many people in predominantly Christian groups are farmers, such as the Azande ethnic group that also extends into neighboring areas of DRC and South Sudan. Eastern CAR has been economically and politically marginalized for decades, with a succession of authoritarian central governments that have provided few services and have had limited presence outside of Bangui. This history has incentivized the creation of dozens of armed groups, many of whom recruit along religious or ethnic identities. The proliferation of armed groups, widespread trauma from decades of intermittent violent conflict, and the widespread availability of small arms among civilians have raised the likelihood that sectarian tensions, often sparked by disputes over access to natural resources such as land and precious minerals, devolve into violence.

In March 2013, a coalition of Muslim-majority rebel groups from northern and eastern CAR, called the Seleka, overthrew the central government in Bangui, installing Michel Djotodia as president. Atrocities committed by Seleka fighters sparked the growth of predominantly Christian self-defense groups in western and central CAR, referred to as anti-balaka, leading to an escalation of targeted attacks on civilians based on their ethnicity and religion. Though the bulk of such atrocities from 2013 through mid-2016 were committed in western and central CAR, the conflict heightened existing sectarian tensions in eastern CAR as well.

Djotodia disbanded the Seleka coalition in September 2013, and was forced to leave power in January 2014. As a result, ex-Seleka groups such as the FPRC and UPC concentrated their fighters in the center and east of the country, including in Haute Kotto and western and northern Mbomou. However, Ugandan AU-RTF troops prevented ex-Seleka groups from expanding into Haut Mbomou and eastern Mbomou, most dramatically in a June 2014 incident in which Ugandan troops killed 15 Seleka fighters near Nzako. In 2017, with Ugandan troops no longer present in Nzako or other towns in Mbomou prefecture, ex-Seleka and self-defense forces have been able to operate there with near impunity.

WARNING SIGNS OF SECTARIAN TENSION IN EASTERN CAR

Before the escalation of attacks by armed groups in 2017, smaller outbreaks of violence in Haut Mbomou and Mbomou prefectures served as warning signs of simmering sectarian tension in eastern CAR:

June 2011: Six Peuhl civilians and one Azande civilian were killed in a series of clashes in the towns of Zemio and Obo in Haut Mbomou prefecture.

Mid-2013: Looting, rapes, and killings by Seleka forces under the command of Colonel Abdallah in Bangassou escalated tensions between Muslims and Christians in the community.

October 2013: Six people were killed during clashes between Peuhl pastoralists and self-defense militias in the community of Bahr in Haut Mbomou prefecture.

November 2014: Clashes between Muslims and Christians near the town of Zemio killed three people and left 14 others injured.

The evolution of the “self-defense” militias in eastern CAR has reflected the social fragmentation in the country since the outbreak of widespread sectarian hostilities in 2013. Self-defense militias were mobilized in many communities in Mbomou and Haut Mbomou following the beginning of LRA incursions in 2008, tending to be loosely organized and focused on responding to localized threats to security. In several communities, such as Mboki, self-defense militias were diverse, with members from the Azande, Peuhl, and even Chadian populations cooperating in response to the LRA threat. Since 2013, self-defense militias in eastern CAR have become more associated with Christian and farming demographics—mirroring the composition and motivations of anti-balaka groups in central and western CAR and mobilizing in response to broader geopolitical dynamics in addition to immediate, localized threats to security. In late 2013 and 2014, self-defense militias with these more sectarian motivations clashed periodically with Peuhl pastoralists and other Muslim groups, including in areas controlled by Ugandan troops.

More recently, some self-defense (anti-balaka) groups in Haute Kotto and Mbomou have reportedly cooperated with the FPRC to target the UPC, a Peuhl-dominated ex-Seleka faction, and Peuhl civilians, including women and children, that they perceive to be affiliated with the UPC. However, targeting of Muslims beyond the Peuhl community by self-defense (anti-balaka) militias, including during the May 12 attack on Bangassou, has caused tensions within their opportunistic coalition with the FPRC. The May 16–18 clashes in Bria were sparked in part by anger among FPRC-aligned fighters that self-defense (anti-balaka) fighters targeted Muslims in Bangassou. Though self-defense militias in eastern CAR are commonly referred to as “anti-balaka” groups, the extent to which they coordinate with, or are otherwise linked to, anti-balaka leaders at the national level remains unclear.⁶

6. During the May 12 attack on Bangassou, militia members deliberately pinned MINUSCA personnel at their base and removed road access to the town, while other fighters took advantage of MINUSCA being trapped to target the Muslim neighborhood of Tokoyo. See Security Council Report, “Central African Republic, June 2017 Monthly Forecast,” June 2017. The sophistication of this attack, likely beyond the capability of local self-defense groups, has raised concerns that local self-defense groups in Mbomou have developed links with anti-balaka leaders at the national level, or that anti-balaka fighters further west have become operational in Mbomou prefecture.

The fragmentation of self-defense militias in eastern CAR is similar to trends in neighboring areas of South Sudan, highlighting the role such groups can play in escalating violence. In South Sudan's Western Equatoria State, the mobilization of "Arrow Boy" self-defense militias, composed primarily of Azande, rose dramatically in 2009 and 2010 in response to increased LRA activity.⁷ These self-defense militias were widely supported by the Azande population, including civil society leaders and local politicians, and were a significant factor in the reduction of LRA violence in the area. However, Arrow Boys also periodically clashed with members of the local Dinka community and Dinka-dominated SPLA units, as well as with Peuhl pastoralists.⁸ In May 2013, dozens of armed men, many of them South Sudanese Arrow Boys, marched undetected from Western Equatoria to Obo, an operation launched without the support or knowledge of many South Sudanese Azande civil society leaders and politicians. The group was reportedly organized by a Central African dissident, but the motivations of individuals who joined the march were diverse. Some reported having been paid, while others believed they were pursuing the LRA.⁹

In 2015, some South Sudanese Arrow Boys, including Alfred Fatuyo, joined South Sudanese militias fighting the SPLA.¹⁰ The mobilization of these groups, and their attempted appropriation of the popular credibility that previous iterations of the Arrow Boy had established, has proven divisive among the Azande population in South Sudan. Unlike earlier Arrow Boy mobilizations, Fatuyo's group has also forcibly recruited young men and looted supplies from the Azande population in South Sudan, as well as among Congolese Azande and South Sudanese Azande displaced in DRC. Though Fatuyo's forces have yet to attempt recruitment in eastern CAR, the presence of Central African Azande and South Sudanese Azande refugees in the Obo area raises the risk that they will attempt to do so, particularly once Ugandan troops fully withdraw.

LRA activity exacerbates sectarian tensions and mistrust of MINUSCA

The LRA has committed more than 575 attacks in Haute Kotto, Mbomou, and Haut Mbomou prefectures since entering eastern CAR in 2008, killing more than 450 civilians and abducting 2,620 others. LRA groups are isolated and rarely interact with other armed groups or civilians, and have long been viewed by some international protection actors as a "separate" issue from the broader sectarian conflicts in CAR. However, in addition to the direct impact LRA violence has on civilian security, the rebel group's activity has exacerbated tensions between Muslim and Christian communities, and between pastoralist and farming communities, highlighting the ripple effect that violence by outside groups can have on local social dynamics.

LRA activity has especially exacerbated tensions between Azande and Peuhl communities. Some Central African Azande, many of whom have been displaced by LRA violence, accuse Peuhl pastoralists of collaborating with the LRA because they range deep into rural areas where LRA forces also operate. In reality, Peuhl are often targeted by LRA groups that attack them and steal their cattle.¹¹ In addition to targeting pastoralists, LRA groups frequently loot artisanal gold and diamond mining sites, placing miners at grave risk. Such activities contribute to the illicit trade of natural resources, which undermines economic growth and sustains non-state armed groups in the region.

7. In addition to the Azande, members of the Balandia ethnic group were also well-represented in the Western Equatorial Arrow Boys militias. Alfred Fatuyo, the senior Arrow Boy leader now leading one of the South Sudanese militias resisting the SPLA, is a Balandia. See Small Arms Survey, "Conflict in Western Equatoria," 16 July 2016.

8. Arrow Boys clashed with Dinka civilians and Dinka-dominated SPLA units in and near Yambio in 2005, as well as January 2010. They also clashed with Peuhl pastoralists near Tambura in December 2011, forcing Peuhl who had crossed the border into South Sudan to return to eastern CAR. See The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative, "Peace Can Be: President Obama's chance to help end LRA atrocities in 2012," February 2012.

9. They clashed with Central African military (FACA) and Ugandan troops upon nearing Obo, and several later died in military custody. Interview with civil society leader, Yambio, South Sudan, October 2013. See also Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Central African Republic: Mapping human rights violations 2003-2015," May 2017.

10. For further details on Fatuyo's militia and other armed groups in Western Equatoria, see Small Arms Survey, "Spreading Fallout: The collapse of the ARCSS and new conflict along the Equatorias-DRC border," May 2017.

11. LRA defectors have reported that some LRA commanders trade ivory, gold, and diamonds with Peuhl and other Muslim traders, as well as with ex-Seleka officers. See Invisible Children and The Resolve, "The State of the LRA in 2016," February 2016.

LRA activity has also undermined trust between civilians in eastern CAR and MINUSCA. Following a surge of LRA attacks in Haute Kotto prefecture in early 2016, some ex-Seleka factions sought to boost their local credibility at MINUSCA's expense by deploying fighters in response to LRA attacks, capitalizing on the perception of some civilians that the UN mission's response to the LRA threat has been inadequate. Central Africans' frustration at continued LRA attacks has not only undermined their trust of MINUSCA, it has also evolved into a direct threat to the safety of the mission's personnel. On April 17, 2016, a local self-defense force near the town of Rafai in Mbomou prefecture repelled an LRA attack before nearby MINUSCA troops responded to the incident, heightening existing frustration at the perceived slow response of MINUSCA troops to LRA attacks. When MINUSCA troops sought to protect an LRA abductee who had been wounded and captured during the clash, they were confronted by an angry crowd that ultimately killed a Moroccan peacekeeper.

III. U.S., UN SECURITY COUNCIL MUST TAKE STEPS TO IMPROVE CIVILIAN PROTECTION

The presence of MINUSCA peacekeepers, as well as the efforts of MINUSCA's civilian staff, has undoubtedly reduced armed group violence in eastern CAR and prevented the crisis there from worsening beyond its current status. However, escalating sectarian violence and deliberate targeting of MINUSCA personnel in eastern CAR poses a grave threat to the mission's ability to implement its mandate to protect civilians. During several high profile outbreaks of violence in recent months, including Bria in November 2016 and Bangassou in May 2017, MINUSCA troops were slow to take action necessary to protect civilians in towns where they are deployed.¹² MINUSCA troops have also been largely unsuccessful in protecting civilians in smaller, more remote communities from LRA violence.¹³ The Central African military (FACA) has a small number of soldiers deployed in several towns in eastern CAR, including Obo, but they lack the training and resources to adequately protect civilians from armed group attacks.

The withdrawal of U.S. and Ugandan troops places an even greater burden on MINUSCA to defend civilians from the LRA and other armed groups in eastern CAR. Should ex-Seleka or self-defense groups seek to expand their influence into eastern Mbomou and Haut Mbomou prefectures, sectarian violence could escalate quickly and dramatically there. The U.S. and Ugandan withdrawal also jeopardizes the future of defection initiatives targeting the LRA, which have played a key role in reducing the number of LRA combatants from approximately 400 in 2010 to fewer than 130 today. The May 2017 AU PSC communique urged the UN Security Council to "take into account the disarmament of the LRA in the mandate of [MINUSCA]."

Civil society leaders have attempted to de-escalate sectarian tensions and mediate between armed groups at the local level, with some success. On May 20, religious and other community leaders temporarily de-escalated sectarian tensions in Nzako.¹⁴ However, an outbreak of violence there on June 6 triggered by UPC advances on the town demonstrated the limitations such efforts face when armed groups operate freely and with impunity. MINUSCA civilian officials have also attempted to mediate between armed groups in several locations.¹⁵ In addition, community-based early warning systems have helped improve the ability of civilians to prepare contingency plans that mitigate their vulnerability to armed group activity,¹⁶ but such efforts are threatened by the intensity of recent violence.

12. For a detailed examination of MINUSCA's response to fighting between the FPRC and UPC in Bria in November 2017, see Center for Civilians in Conflict, "The Primacy of Protection: Delivering on the MINUSCA Mandate in the Central African Republic," 5 April 2017. For additional analysis on MINUSCA's response to armed group attacks in Bria and Bangassou, see Human Rights Watch, "Central African Republic: Civilians Killed During Clashes," 5 December 2016, and Security Council Report, "Central African Republic, June 2017 Monthly Forecast," June 2017.

13. See Invisible Children and The Resolve, "LRA Crisis Tracker 2016 Midyear Security Brief," July 2016.

14. Interview with civil society leader, Nzako, CAR, May 2017.

15. See Center for Civilians in Conflict, "The Primacy of Protection," 5 April 2017.

16. See USAID, "Performance Evaluation and Needs Assessment Report of USAID Programming to Communities Affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in Central Africa," 2 November 2015.

From June 12–13, the UN Security Council will meet to discuss the work of both MINUSCA and the UN Regional Office in Central Africa (UNOCA), which coordinates the UN’s regional response to the LRA crisis. During briefings with MINUSCA and UNOCA officials, Council members should emphasize the importance of MINUSCA more effectively utilizing existing resources to protect civilians from violence, including holding troop contingents responsible for decisively implementing their protection of civilians mandate during outbreaks of armed group violence. Council members should also emphasize the importance of MINUSCA and UNOCA providing context-appropriate support to, and coordination with, locally-led mediation and civilian early warning mechanisms. Council members should request an update from UNOCA and MINUSCA on the status of coordination with the UN peacekeeping missions in DRC (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS) on efforts to track and deter cross-border movements of the LRA, poachers, and other armed groups into eastern CAR. In the coming months, Council members should seek further input from the UN Secretary-General, MINUSCA Special Representative to the Secretary-General, and civil society groups on whether changes should be made to MINUSCA’s mandate, which is up for renewal in November 2017, to enhance its ability to protect civilians.

Council members should also seek input from the AU PSC and other stakeholders on potential changes to MINUSCA’s mandate to enhance its role in the disarmament of the LRA. In particular, the Council should examine whether MINUSCA should assist in the transportation and repatriation of LRA defectors and broadcast defection messages encouraging LRA members to defect, roles that MONUSCO has taken on in neighboring LRA-affected areas of DRC.

In Washington, the U.S. Congress should ensure that its Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 budget appropriates sufficient funding to fully meet U.S. obligations to support UN peacekeeping missions, including MINUSCA. Congress should also avoid funding cuts to the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) proposed in President Donald Trump’s FY18 budget request. Funding the State Department and USAID at levels matching or exceeding previous fiscal years is necessary to ensure that these agencies can continue supporting programming that has proven effective in enhancing civilian early warning systems, community resilience to armed group activity, and social cohesion among diverse demographic groups.

IV. CONCLUSION

Due to relatively restrained levels of sectarian violence from 2013 through mid-2016 and the steady presence of U.S. and Ugandan troops, the prefectures of Haute Kotto, Mbomou, and Haut Mbomou have received comparatively little attention from MINUSCA and other protection actors more focused on western and central CAR. The withdrawal of U.S. and Ugandan troops and the recent escalation of sectarian violence clearly demonstrates the need for more effective MINUSCA protection interventions and international support to local early warning, resilience, and social cohesion initiatives in eastern CAR. The continued ripple effect of attacks by the LRA in eastern CAR—and the presence of armed poachers and other armed groups along the border between CAR, DRC, and South Sudan—makes such efforts even more urgent. Without leadership from the U.S. and UN Security Council to prevent further armed group violence, civilians in eastern CAR will continue to suffer and be at risk of intensified atrocities.