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Central African Republic

Civilians in peril in the wild north



September 2007
AI Index: AFR 19/003/2007

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Summary

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Amnesty International (AI) has, for several years, received reports of serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by members of disparate armed groups and government soldiers in the north of the Central African Republic (CAR). The abuses include unlawful killings, abductions, destruction of private property, rape and other forms of sexual violence against women.

Evidence collected by AI delegates in May 2007 suggests that senior government officials have failed to establish effective strategies to protect the people of northern CAR, beyond signing peace agreements with armed opposition groups and launching attacks in the area that disproportionately targets and affects the civilian population.

The information obtained by AI's researchers – mainly from refugees but also from human rights and humanitarian organizations – depicts a harrowing situation, of people of northern CAR abandoned to merciless armed groups, government soldiers and armed criminal gangs that kill, destroy and burn property and houses, pillage, kidnap children and rape with impunity. From testimony the researchers collected from victims and witnesses of serious human rights abuses, AI has concluded that military and political leaders have ordered and/or condoned human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. Government forces, particularly the Presidential Guard (*Garde présidentielle*), which is directly responsible to President François Bozizé, is implicated in unlawfully killing scores of civilians. Armed groups have taken sections of the population hostage and killed those who had refused to support them. Government officials and soldiers have abdicated their duty to protect the population and their property. As a result, armed bandits, known locally as Zaraguinas (*coupeurs de route*), have taken advantage of the vacuum of authority to pillage and abduct children for ransom, without fear of being brought to justice. Chadian bandits and Chadian government soldiers have also carried out sporadic incursions into northern CAR and killed unarmed civilians and looted their property.

More than 70,000 northern CAR citizens have fled to neighbouring countries, and several hundred thousand others have been internally displaced as a result of the insecurity prevailing in the region. The refugees have limited access to healthcare and other humanitarian assistance.

Scores of children and some adults have been abducted by armed bandits, especially in north-western CAR. Most of the victims of abduction have been young Mbororo children. There has been virtually no action taken by the government to directly prevent the abductions, arrest the perpetrators or otherwise protect the population. By its inaction, the government has failed in its obligations to the people who are legally under its care.

Chadian government soldiers are reported to have carried out incursions into northern CAR under the pretext of assisting CAR government forces to beat off offensives by armed political groups or protecting their territory from incursions by Chadian armed political groups using the CAR as a springboard. In the process, the Chadian soldiers have carried out attacks on unarmed civilians. Armed Chadian pastoralists are also reported to have attacked CAR peasant farmers and/or destroyed their crops, obviously without fear of being stopped or prosecuted by CAR officials.

Under international law, parties to an armed conflict have a responsibility to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of civilians. Deliberately targeting civilians in a situation of armed conflict is a violation of international humanitarian law. It is a war crime. In some circumstances it could constitute a crime against humanity.

Amnesty International is publishing this report in order to bring the plight of the people of northern CAR to the attention of the international community. With the information and recommendations contained in it, AI is calling on governments – principally the CAR government – to take immediate steps to protect the people of northern CAR. AI is concerned that if measures are not promptly taken, the situation in the CAR may degenerate further and worsen the already dire security and human rights situation, particularly in northern CAR, but also in the rest of the country and other countries in the region.

This report summarizes a 28-page document (10,483 words), : *Central African Republic, Civilians in peril in the wild north* (AI Index: AFR 19/003/2007) issued by Amnesty International on 19 September 2007. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email:

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INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT, 1 EASTON STREET, LONDON WC1X 0DW, UNITED KINGDOM

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Central African Republic

Civilians in peril in the wild north

1. Introduction

Amnesty International (AI) has, for several years, received reports of serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by members of disparate armed groups and government soldiers in the north of the Central African Republic (CAR). The abuses include unlawful killings, abductions, destruction of private property, rape and other forms of sexual violence against women. CAR has been unstable since independence and for more than a decade AI has also received reports of attacks on the population by armed bandits, especially in north-western CAR. AI's recent research mission has established that the authorities have taken no steps to protect the civilian population from such attacks. AI was unable to visit northern CAR due to the insecurity that continues to affect the region, but was able to visit Bangui, the capital, and southern Chad where more than 50,000 CAR refugees are currently sheltered in refugee camps.



Figure 1 CAR refugee women in southern Chad, May 2007 ©AI

Following the receipt of reports that refugees escaping violence and human rights violations in northern CAR were continuing to flow into southern Chad, AI sent two researchers to that region in May 2007 to interview a cross-section of the refugees. The organization's researchers visited Dosseye and Gondje refugee camps, as well as border posts at Bekoninga and Betoye where new refugees entered Chad. During their stay in Chad, the researchers met representatives of local human rights groups, government officials and representatives of UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations.

The researchers also visited Bangui, the capital of the CAR, where they held discussions with several government officials, representatives of local civil society organizations and human rights defenders. They also held meetings with representatives of foreign governments, UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations.

The information obtained by AI's researchers – mainly from refugees but also from human rights and humanitarian organizations – depicts a harrowing situation of people of northern CAR abandoned to merciless armed groups, government soldiers and armed criminal gangs that kill, destroy and burn property and houses, pillage, kidnap children and rape with impunity. From testimony the researchers collected from victims and witnesses of serious human rights abuses, AI has concluded that military and political leaders have ordered and/or condoned human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law. Government forces, particularly the Presidential Guard (*Garde présidentielle*), which is directly responsible to President François Bozizé, is implicated in the killing of scores of civilians. Armed groups have taken sections of the population hostage and killed those who had refused to support them. Government officials and soldiers have abdicated their duty to protect the population and their property. As a result, armed bandits, known locally as Zaraguinas (*coupeurs de route*), have taken advantage of the vacuum of authority to pillage and abduct children for ransom, without fear of being brought to justice. Chadian bandits and Chadian government soldiers have also carried out sporadic incursions into northern CAR and killed unarmed civilians and looted their property.

Evidence collected by AI delegates suggest that senior government officials have failed to establish effective strategies to protect the people of northern CAR, beyond signing peace agreements with armed opposition groups and launching attacks in the area that disproportionately targets and affects the civilian population. Although signing peace agreements is a step towards reducing violence and instability, which in turn leads to human rights violations, this does not address the human rights abuses committed by criminal elements known as Zaraguinas in the CAR. Information collected by AI's researchers indicated that many Zaraguinas are demobilised or disenchanted former members of government forces and armed opposition groups from the CAR, from neighbouring countries and from as far away as West Africa. The demobilization of former armed groups and government soldiers has not resulted in peace and stability, rather it has resulted in some of the demobilised persons turning to violent crime targeted against the civilian population. Indeed, a large section of the refugees interviewed by AI allege that they had fled CAR after attacks by Zaraguinas and not from government soldiers or armed political groups.

There has been discussion at the UN Security Council and in the UN Secretary General's reports¹ of the human rights and humanitarian crisis in north-eastern CAR, largely because of its proximity to the Sudanese region of Darfur and eastern Chad. However, very little attention has been paid to the equally, and at times more critical, situation in the rest of northern CAR. Based on the information gathered by its researchers, AI believes that action is required to protect the entire population in all parts of northern CAR, and possibly beyond.

Amnesty International is publishing this report in order to bring the plight of the people of northern CAR to the attention of the international community. With the information and recommendations contained in it, AI is calling on governments – principally the CAR government – to take immediate steps to protect the people of northern CAR. Where the government lacks the capacity and expertise to exercise its obligation to protect the population, it should seek the assistance of the international community and intergovernmental organizations to assist it in protecting civilians and bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. AI is concerned that if measures are not promptly taken, the situation in the CAR may degenerate further and worsen the already dire security and human rights situation, particularly in northern CAR, but also in the rest of the country and other countries in the region.

2. Background

Thousands of people from northern CAR fled northwards to neighbouring Chad and many more were internally displaced during fighting in late 2002 and early 2003 between forces loyal to the then CAR President Ange-Félix Patassé and members of an armed opposition group led by former army Chief of Staff General François Bozizé. President Patassé's forces were initially supported by a contingent of Libyan government forces and later by members of a Congolese armed group known as the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (*Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo*, MLC)² while Bozizé was supported by the Chadian government. General Bozizé's armed group overthrew Patassé's government on 15 March 2003. At first President Bozizé announced that he would lead a transitional government and eventually hand power to an elected government, but he subsequently changed his mind and decided to become a presidential candidate. He was elected after a second round in May 2005 amidst protests by his opponents against rigging.

¹ The most recent reports include: *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic* (S/2007/97), dated 22 December 2006; *Report of the Secretary-General on Chad and the Central African Republic* (S/2007/97), dated 23 February 2007; *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic and the activities of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic* (S/2007/376), dated 22 June 2007; and *Report of the Secretary-General on Chad and the Central African Republic* (S/2007/488), dated 10 August 2007.

² See Amnesty International's report, *Central African Republic: Five months of war against women* (AI Index: AFR19/001/2004)

Armed groups launch attacks on President Bozizé's government

By June 2005, attacks by an armed political group loyal to former President Patassé were being reported in northern CAR, especially in the Ouham and Ouham-Pende regions (*préfectures*). Amidst reports of unlawful killings and other human rights violations, as well as violations of international humanitarian law during counter-insurgency operations by government forces, the government persistently denied the existence of any armed political group. It blamed attacks on the Zaraguinas. In reality, both the armed political groups and banditry existed in northern CAR.

After a major armed opposition attack on government forces in Paoua on 29 January 2006 the government finally admitted that it was facing an insurrection. Reports emanating from Paoua indicated that several dozen unarmed civilians had been killed during reprisal attacks by government forces. Some humanitarian sources in the CAR estimated that government soldiers killed more than 100 civilians during the fighting, mostly during reprisal attacks. There were also reports that armed groups had used civilians as human shields and/or recruited children and other local people to attack government forces. In subsequent appeals, Amnesty International urged the CAR government to ensure an impartial and independent investigation into reports of human rights abuses in Paoua. However, by August 2007, no such investigation had been carried out.³

From mid-2005 there was sporadic fighting between government forces and members of an armed opposition group known as the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie*, APRD). The APRD was led by Abdoulaye Miskine (also known as Martin Koumta Madji), a former military aide to former President Patassé, and was based in the former president's home region of Ouham-Pende. Reports received by AI since 2005, and especially during the visit to southern Chad and Bangui in May 2007, consistently showed that most fighting between armed groups and government forces resulted in few casualties among combatants. However, dozens of unarmed civilians, especially men and boys, were subjected to extrajudicial executions, and entire villages were burned and property looted or destroyed by government forces during reprisal attacks. Government forces, especially the Presidential Guard, reportedly accused civilians of supporting the armed groups or failing to report them to the authorities. Although the number of unarmed civilians killed by government forces remains hard to confirm, anecdotal reports suggest that they may have killed hundreds of civilians since mid-2005.

Between October and December 2006, a new armed political group, known as the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (*Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement*, UFDR) launched attacks on and captured several north-eastern towns, especially in the Vakaga province. UFDR combatants are reported to have attacked

³ See AI's public statement entitled *Central African Republic: Government soldiers and armed groups attacking unarmed civilians and critics* (AI Index: AFR19/001/2006), 7 February 2006.

government forces and assets in the province and summarily executed members of the security forces and civilians suspected of supporting the government. The UFDR was dislodged in November and December 2006 from the towns it had captured by the government's Central African Armed Forces (*Forces armées centrafricaines*, FACA) with military and air support from CAR-based French troops and members of a regional peacekeeping force known as the Multinational Forces in the CAR (*Forces multinationales en Centrafrique*, FOMUC)⁴. CAR government forces are reported to have extrajudicially executed unarmed civilians, torched villages, and looted or destroyed property belonging to the local population during counter-insurgency operations.

Attacks by the UFDR took place several months after planes carrying Sudan-based Chadian members of an armed opposition group known as the United Front for Change (*Front uni pour le changement*, FUC) used CAR's Tiringoulou airfield to ferry fighters and weapons from Sudan. FUC fighters subsequently crossed with their weapons to Chad and, in April 2006, launched an attack on the capital, N'Djamena. FACA soldiers deployed in Vakaga province after the Tiringoulou incident are reported to have burned or destroyed houses and property, and killed unarmed civilians, whom they accused of conniving with the Chadian armed opposition group. These attacks on the local population appear to have triggered a local insurrection, which transformed itself into the UFDR, although it is unclear whether the UFDR had been formed before April 2006. The UFDR leadership also claimed that they were launching an insurrection to protest against the government's failure to provide economic infrastructure and social services to Vakaga province. The UFDR's military commander is Zakaria Damane, while its political leaders are Benin-based Abakar Saboune and Michel Am Non Drako Djotodia. The two political leaders were arrested by the Benin authorities in November 2006 at the request of the CAR government and were still being held in Benin's capital, Cotonou, in August 2007.

Since the start of 2007, the CAR government has been under pressure to seek a peaceful settlement to the armed conflict between government forces and armed political groups. Libya and several other governments have offered to mediate. On 2 February 2007, the CAR government, represented by its Minister of Justice, signed a peace agreement with APRD's Abdoulaye Miskine under the mediation of the Libyan President Muammar Ghaddafi. The signing took place in Syrte, Libya. Abdoulaye Miskine returned to the CAR but soon went back to Libya complaining that the government had failed to provide him with suitable accommodation and other facilities that it had promised. Senior government officials in Bangui have said that the government did not believe that Abdoulaye Miskine represented or led as many combatants as he had claimed during negotiations. In July 2007, the

⁴ About 800 FOMUC soldiers drawn from three member states – Gabon, Chad and the Republic of Congo – of the Economic Community of Central African States (Communauté économique des Etats d'Afrique centrale, CEMAC) have been deployed in the CAR since 2002 to help stabilise the country and rebuild its armed forces. They are supported by several hundred French government soldiers who are also involved in training units of the CAR government forces. The FOMUC deployment has financial support from the European Union.

government announced that it had appointed Abdoulaye Miskine a presidential advisor. At the start of August, Abdoulaye Miskine reportedly issued a statement in which he declined the appointment on the grounds that the government had failed to fully implement the provisions of the peace agreement.

Represented by the governor (*préfet*) of Ouham-Pende province, General Raymond Ndougou, the government signed a peace agreement with UFDR's Zakaria Damane on 1 April 2007 in Tiringoulou. The CAR government demanded that UFDR's political leaders accept the Tiringoulou agreement before they would be freed. Abakar Saboune and Michel Am Non Drako Djotodia reportedly made their prior release a condition for accepting the agreement. The stalemate was still in place by August 2007. It was unclear at the start of September whether Zakaria Damane had accepted and taken up the post of presidential advisor that he had reportedly been offered in July.

Armed banditry escalates in northern CAR

Sources in the CAR have informed Amnesty International that the proliferation of armed bandits, locally known as Zaraguinas, started in the early 1980s after an attempted overthrow of former President André Kolingba by a section of the armed forces. Soldiers loyal to the coup leaders fled north and hid in the forests and grasslands. From there they attacked and robbed travellers, initially to survive. These former soldiers were later joined by members of former armed opposition groups and soldiers from Chad, which is also experiencing political instability and a series of armed conflicts. In subsequent years, banditry became lucrative for the perpetrators who also carried out abductions (especially of children but also of adults) for ransom. They enjoyed almost total impunity as result of a fragility of the state in Bangui, which was due to mutinous, undisciplined, ill-equipped and ill-trained government forces. Indeed, members of government forces loyal to deposed leaders or soldiers and members of armed opposition groups who had been demobilised also joined the Zaraguinas. Attracted by the impunity and the vacuum of authority, bandits are reported to be coming into northern CAR from other neighbouring countries and from as far away as West Africa.

Over the years, the Zaraguinas have become better organized than the government forces; they are often equipped with automatic weapons and have better knowledge of the terrain on which they operate. Many of the refugees or their relatives who had been abducted or dispossessed by Zaraguinas told AI that members of the security forces and government officials rarely made any effort to arrest Zaraguinas. In the rare cases that they did, the Zaraguinas had more firepower and easily beat off any pursuit by government forces. The victims believe many of the Zaraguinas are local people who speak local languages. Further evidence that they are local people is that they usually cover their faces with turbans so as not to be recognized, and they appear to know how many cattle and other possessions the families own. Local people and members of the security forces usually know the location of Zaraguina camps but never attempt to arrest the Zaraguinas or rescue the victims.

Mass displacement of the population

Tens of thousands of northern CAR citizens have fled to neighbouring countries, and several hundred thousand others have been internally displaced as a result of the insecurity prevailing in the region. As many as 50,000 people have fled to southern Chad and over 26,000 have crossed to Cameroon, while several thousand have fled from north-eastern CAR to Sudan.⁵ The refugees in southern Chad have limited access to healthcare and other humanitarian assistance. During their visit to refugee camps in southern Chad, AI learned that refugees were receiving only 8.4kg of maize meal flour, a few hundred grammes of salt and a cupful of oil per month per person from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR. In many cases, refugees had to sell some of their meagre supply of maize meal flour to buy vegetables to eat with the maize meal. By the start of August 2007, CAR refugees in Cameroon had no access to humanitarian assistance and were largely surviving on assistance provided by the local Cameroonian population and by selling the animals they had been able to flee with.



Figure 2 A CAR family just arrived in southern Chad awaiting transfer to a camp ©AI

Over 200,000 people are internally displaced in northern CAR. The internally displaced persons (IDPs) have had to abandon their homes, food reserves and other property, which are often looted or destroyed by government soldiers, armed groups or armed bandits. The displaced people have limited access to humanitarian assistance, and succumb to exposure and lack of medical care when they try to survive in the wild.

⁵ For more details, read the UNHCR Statistical Yearbook Country Data Sheets 30 April 2007, www.unhcr.org/country/caf.html

The CAR government and donor governments have failed to adequately assist CAR refugees and IDPs. UN agencies and other intergovernmental organizations require the support of governments and other donor institutions if they are to have the means and security required to alleviate the plight of people in northern CAR.

3. Government soldiers target unarmed civilians

From extensive interviews with witnesses and victims, Amnesty International was able to establish a common pattern of attacks against unarmed civilians and their property in northern CAR. The attacks usually started with members of armed political groups launching attacks on government forces and state installations. After the initial fire-fight, ranging from a few hours to several days, locally-based government forces receive reinforcements from better equipped members of the Presidential Guard. By the time the Presidential Guard arrive, the attackers invariably would have left. The Presidential Guard, alone or with other members of the security forces, it is reported, often launches punitive attacks against the local population. The local population is often accused of supporting or sheltering the armed groups. Men and boys are particularly targeted and many are killed or wounded. Suspected members of armed groups are arrested and often summarily executed. Expecting to be targeted, some residents, particularly the able-bodied in the areas in and around the scene of the initial battle often flee into the bush where they hide for weeks or even months. As well as killing members of the local community, the security forces almost always burn down the houses of local inhabitants as a punishment for their suspected collusion.

After being attacked by armed groups, FACA soldiers frequently carried out reprisal attacks on unarmed civilians. For example, in June 2005 soldiers attacked Sonodjo village near Markounda after armed groups had killed three of their members. Accusing local people of supporting the armed opposition groups, the soldiers set fire to all the houses in the area. According to witnesses of the attack interviewed in a camp in southern Chad, the soldiers were members of the Presidential Guard. Virtually the entire population of Sonodjo fled and they now live as refugees in Chad.

Yacoub Ahmat Mahmat, 41, fled Paoua after government soldiers destroyed civilian houses and other property in what appeared to be an indiscriminate reprisal for an attack by an armed opposition group that had taken place on 6 January 2007. After members of the armed opposition group had left the town, members of the Presidential Guard travelling in trucks came to his village and beat up many of its inhabitants. Members of the Presidential Guard robbed him of FCFA 1.6 million.⁶ He told AI that between 6 and 28 January 2007, people in his home area were too afraid to sleep in their houses because soldiers indiscriminately shot into the air every night. One person was reportedly killed during the shootings on 8 January. The soldiers abducted three people, known as **Elie**, **Souley** and **Amadou**, from Paoua. Elie

⁶ FCFA 500 are equivalent to US\$1.

was so severely beaten that he could barely walk when AI researchers interviewed him in May 2007. Elie informed AI that the soldiers shot and killed Adamou, but he did not know what happened to Souley. On 12 February 2007, in the aftermath of the attacks, 15 Zaraguinas stole 15 of Mahmat's cattle. Fearing further attacks by government soldiers, armed groups and Zaraguinas, he decided to flee to Chad.

Pascal Yanje, 55, told AI that members of the Presidential Guard who arrived in three vehicles attacked his village, Bedoro, in northern Paoua, on 11 February 2006. The soldiers apparently suspected the villagers of harbouring armed opposition groups. The soldiers opened fire indiscriminately on the villagers, killing eight, and they set fire to many houses in the area. Yanje himself was shot in the foot and a scar was visible when AI researchers met him in Dosseye refugee camp. Those killed during the attack included 40-year-old **Clément Marboua**, 50-year-old **Timothé Gaoua** and **Grégoire Djamaï**, the village chief.



Figure 3 Pascal Yanje ©AI

When the villagers fled from their homes as a result of the shooting, soldiers entered houses looking for any who might be hiding. A man known as **Moundabi**, who was sick and

in bed, was one of the people killed. The villagers later returned during the night and buried the victims who had been killed.

Raymond Djasrabaye, 26, was one of many people in his village of Beboura in Paoua, who were shot and wounded or killed by government forces in March 2007. His father, **Jean Naisson** and mother, **Pauline Mboyoum**, were killed. Djasrabaye himself was shot and wounded in the arm. He told AI that he lost a lot of blood. He developed gangrene from lack of treatment. When he fled to Chad, he was taken by an international medical charity to Goré hospital in Southern Chad where his arm was amputated. Djasrabaye told AI that armed groups killed several other people, including 70-year-old **Simon Ngaisam**. Soldiers also set fire to many of the houses between Beboura and Bemal. The soldiers reportedly entered Beboura and the surrounding areas on foot to avoid detection and to pre-empt possible escape by the local population. Some of the soldiers were reported to be wearing turbans that hid their faces, as well as military uniform.



Figure 4 Raymond Djasrabaye ©AI

Alain Ali (40) told AI delegates that in February 2006 soldiers came to Bemal near the Chadian border, apparently searching for armed opposition groups. Soldiers opened fire on local residents killing some and wounding others. Alain Ali told AI that he was shot in the right thigh. Another bullet grazed his nose, entered his right jaw, hit and then exited in his right arm. After the soldiers had left the area, Alain Ali's relatives carried him into the bush, where they nursed him before taking him across the border into Chad. On arrival in Chad, Ali was treated with the help of an international medical organization.

Angèle Ndingatouloum's brother, **Simplice Bessain**, was resting in bed after work in the fields when members of the Presidential Guard forced their way into his house in Bedoro. They dragged him out of the house and shot him dead at the doorstep. Ndingatouloum saw her brother being killed, as she lay ill with a swollen jaw under a mango tree. His relatives took his body to the bush after nightfall and buried him there. On the same day that Bessain was killed, members of the Presidential Guard attacked a group of male youths, killing eight and wounding two. Among the youths who were killed were **Grégoire Djangenaye**, who was a village chief, and his brother **Loban Djenganaye, Belle Wilfried, Clément Ngakoutou, Franklin Moundabe, Clément Torkis Marboua and Augustin Djengantouloum.**

Jean-Louis Ndingandili, 35, was returning home from work on 6 February 2006 when he met members of the Presidential Guard near Bemal. The soldiers shot at him, hitting him once in the right arm. When Amnesty International researchers met him in May 2007, the arm appeared to be paralysed. Relatives took him across the border into Chad where he received treatment.

FACA soldiers, particularly members of the Presidential Guard, have carried out extrajudicial executions of people they suspect to be armed opposition group members, without trial or opportunity for the alleged armed opposition members to contest the allegations against them. On 5 January 2007, FACA soldiers in Kaga Bandoro market executed two men aged 22 and 27. The executions were reportedly carried out in front of a crowd of market-goers. After the executions, soldiers reportedly paraded and took photographs with the victims' bodies in the streets. According to reports received by AI, a French government soldier seconded to FOMUC expressed his disapproval of the behaviour of the soldiers to a FACA commander. The government is not known to have taken any action against the commander or the soldiers.

In virtually all parts of northern CAR, where there had been armed attacks on government forces, FACA forces responded by burning houses. At the start of 2007, more than 2,000 houses are reported to have been burned between Kaga Bandoro and Oundago. More than 10,000 people were displaced as a result. Government soldiers looted the inhabitants' property, including food, and burnt what they could not take with them.

On 27 and 28 January 2007, members of the Presidential Guard based in Bossangoa are reported to have burnt down nine villages along the Bozoum - Paoua - Pende axis. During the attack, the soldiers are reported to have summarily executed at least seven unarmed

civilians along this axis. In one incident, on the morning of 27 January, a Presidential Guard commander is reported to have tied a man to granary and burnt him alive. Members of the Presidential Guard under the same commander are reported to have shot dead two Roman Catholic church catechists in Bozoy III village. At least another 10 people were reportedly killed by members of the Presidential Guard along the Paoua - Bozoum axis.

4. Armed groups target civilians

AI has received numerous reports from human rights and humanitarian organizations about attacks by armed groups on unarmed civilians in northern CAR. The organization's researchers obtained many more testimonies from refugees in southern Chad who had witnessed such attacks. According to the testimonies, most of the victims are people accused by the armed groups of collaborating with or supporting government forces. Women and girls have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence but most are reluctant to testify because they fear being stigmatized or rejected by their current or future spouses.

Weti Bibello, 39, a member of the Mbororo ethnic group, told Amnesty International that some members of armed groups deliberately targeted Mbororo people. His 24-year-old brother, **Manou Bibello**, was returning from selling cattle when he was ordered off a truck and shot dead by members of an armed group. People of other ethnic groups were reportedly not harmed. Another member of the Mbororo ethnic group escaped by running into the bush. A week later, Bibello's brother-in-law, **Gagaré Karimou**, was also shot dead by members of an armed group.

Following an attack on Paoua in January 2007, members of an armed group deliberately shot dead 25 heads of cattle belonging to **Ousmane Garga**, 33. The armed group took neither the dead nor the live animals. Ousmane Garga believed that his cattle were killed simply because he belonged to a member of the Mbororo ethnic group. After members of the armed group left the area, members of the Presidential Guard attacked the homes of the residents of Paoua.

In some cases, members of armed political groups attacked civilians to rob them of food and other possessions. For example, **Aboubakar Djikibe Sidik** told AI delegates that his house was ransacked, in May 2006, by members of an armed group. They stole six cows, four bags of sorghum, six bags of cassava and four bags of beans. At the time Djikibe was in hiding after an armed group had threatened his life, having accused him of selling guns to Zaraguinas instead of their armed political group. When his wife, **Aminatou Bokei**, protested at the looting, a member of the group stabbed her near her right ear. Several witnesses told AI that during the same attack, on Betoko village, members of the armed group raped an unspecified number of women and girls.

Some civilians have been attacked and robbed by armed groups. **Djibrilla Adamou**, 22, was walking home from Letele in Bocaranga on 19 March 2007, when he met members of

an armed group. They beat him when he failed to produce the money they demanded. While beating him, the armed group asked Djibrilla if he knew any people in Bocaranga who had weapons. Amidst the beatings, one of the assailants stabbed him in the knee and when AI researchers met him in May 2007 he moved with great difficulty. He had extensive scars on the head and neck. He was bleeding and so severely injured that, according to Djibrilla, the armed group left him for dead. After they left, Djibrilla crept to a path; from there his relatives transferred him to a clinic in Letele. He was helped by relatives to cross to Chad in mid-May.



Figure 5 Djibrilla Adamou ©AI

When members of the UFDR were occupying Ouandja Djalle between 10 November and 27 December 2006, they executed the head of a local self-defence militia and are also reported to have looted property. The UFDR is reported to have recruited children into their ranks and there were also reports that members of the UFDR raped at least 10 women.

After they occupied Ouadda on 15 November 2006, armed UFDR members are reported to have killed a young man from Sam Ouandja. Local people were reportedly subjected to forced labour, especially carrying property looted from residents. According to an internal report by representatives of a humanitarian agency that visited Vakaga province in early 2007, at least 35 women are reported to have been raped by members of the UFDR.

On 11 June 2007 a female French volunteer working with the medical charity *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF), was shot dead by a member of an armed group. The group to which the perpetrator belonged was not immediately established but the APRD was subsequently reported to have declared that one of its combatants had been responsible for

killing the volunteer by mistake. It was reported in July 2007 that the combatant responsible for the killing had been executed without being given an opportunity to have a fair trial before an independent and impartial court of law.

5. Armed bandits abduct for ransom

Scores of children and some adults have been abducted by armed bandits, especially in north-western CAR. There has been virtually no action taken by the government to directly prevent the abductions, arrest the perpetrators or otherwise protect the population. By its inaction, the government has failed in its obligations to the people who are legally under its care.

Most of the victims of abduction have been young Mbororo⁷ children. According to their parents and other people from northern CAR, who Amnesty International's researchers met, this is because children pose no physical risk to the abductors and are much less likely to plan and carry out an escape. Some of the child abductees are reported to have been killed by the bandits after their parents and/or other relatives failed to pay ransoms. Most of the abducted children have been taken while alone or with their older relatives or parents, looking after the family cattle in the bush near their villages. Zaraguinas target children and adults for as long as their parents and relatives have cows to sell in order to pay ransoms.

Adamou Bi Babayo, 56, a member of the Mbororo ethnic group, told AI that his children had been kidnapped more than five times, three of them during 2006. His 18-year-old daughter, **Fadimatou Adamou**, was the first to be kidnapped from a cattle keepers' camp, in June 2006. Babayo was in Paoua town at the time. On his return, he borrowed FCFA 1.5 million (US\$3,000) to pay for his daughter's release. The Zaraguinas held Fadimatou for one month before he was able to pay. During that period he was making contacts to establish where to meet and pay his daughters' abductors. He told AI that groups of Zaraguinas appear to know each other and that, by establishing contact with members of one group, one easily established contact with the group holding an abductee. He sold 32 heads of cattle to repay the money he had borrowed.

Babayo's 9-year-old daughter, **Loussoufa**, was kidnapped at night from her bed in 2006. The Zaraguinas held her for 35 days before Babayo was able to borrow and pay FCFA 1 million for her release. Babayo sold 15 heads of cattle to repay the borrowed ransom. **Bakari Adamou**, 22, was the second to be abducted some 25km south of Paoua, where he was looking after cattle. The abductors initially demanded a ransom of FCFA 1 million but they accepted FCFA 700,000, which Babayo paid after Bakari had been held for 13 days. Babayo's three other children had been abducted in 2003, 2004 and 2005 but the victims had

⁷ Mbororo, also called Peulhs, live in northern CAR but also in Chad, Cameroon and some West African countries. Most of them are nomadic cattle keepers. Bandits target them to steal their cattle and kidnap their children in the knowledge that the families can sell their cattle to raise hefty ransoms that peasant farmers would never be able to pay

managed to escape. Babayo said that the three had been able to escape because, in some cases, the Zaraguinas fell asleep after taking narcotic drugs and alcohol.

Babayo said that he had informed a local military commander about the abductions on several occasions, but each time the commander had refused to pursue the Zaraguinas. Babayo added that government soldiers kept to the main roads and never attempted to pursue or arrest the Zaraguinas or to free the victims of abduction.

Babayo had also been the victim of attacks by members of armed political groups and government forces. As members of an armed group were retreating from Paoua in February 2006, they shot and killed a large number of his cattle. He did not know why they killed his cattle. Government soldiers came to his village soon afterwards and robbed him of his property, including money.

Zaraguinas abducted two of Weti Bibello's children, 12-year-old **Idi Weti** and 7-year-old **Moussa Weti**, in 2005. Before taking the children away, the bandits beat Bibello and told him he would have to pay FCFA 3 million for their release. He sold 28 heads of cattle, six of them donated to him by his father, and raised FCFA 2 million, which he paid to the abductors. The children were released after 22 days in captivity. Idi Weti was again abducted in late 2006 and held by Zaraguinas for about 40 days. Bibello paid FCFA 1.4 million after selling a further 28 heads of cattle. Members of an armed political group and Zaraguinas stole most of his remaining 150 heads of cattle in early 2007. Members of an armed opposition group killed several members of his family in January 2007 (see page 13). With virtually no cattle left and fearing further attacks by armed groups, Bibello fled with his family to Chad in April 2007.

Zaraguinas abducted **Mahmoud Damsi**, 10, and several other children in Paoua at 4am one morning in February 2007. His father, **Ibrahim Damsi**, paid FCFA 550,000 for his release after selling many of his cows. Zaraguinas severely beat him when he met them to pay the ransom. According to Ibrahim Damsi, a woman known as **Ndewa Biba** was abducted by Zaraguinas and had not been released by May 2007.

Bandits have also killed some children whose families fail to pay ransoms. For example, 7-year-old **Ibrahim Garga** was shot dead in early 2006 after his father failed to raise the whole FCFA 10 million demanded by the bandits. He paid FCFA 6 million (US\$12,000) but the bandits still killed his son because he could not find the remaining FCFA 4 million. His father, Nyali Garga, told AI that Ibrahim had been abducted from his home in Paoua for one week before he was shot dead. Five months later, a group of Zaraguinas attacked his home. A month later, Nyali Garga was forced to flee to Chad during fighting between armed groups and members of the FACA.

Ibrahim Adamou's sons were abducted three times by Zaraguinas from his home in Bouasi in Ouham-Pende province. **Younousa Adamou**, 14, was the first one to be abducted in 2004. The family paid a ransom of FCFA 400,000 for his release. **Halidou Adamou**, who

was five years old at the time, was also abducted in 2004. He was released after payment of FCFA 1.5 million as a ransom a month later. **Munimi Adamou**, 10, was abducted in June 2006 and held by Zaraguinas for about one month. When his father went to pay the ransom, the Zaraguinas beat him up and tied him to a tree. He sustained a broken finger while being beaten. He paid a ransom of FCFA 1.6 million for Munimi's release. Ibrahim Adamou sought the help of members of the FACA to rescue his sons, but the soldiers refused to intervene.

Djafun Buba's three sons, **Karim Buba**, **Ahmadou Buba** and **Abdou Buba**, were abducted a total of 10 times between 2005 and 2007. Karim Buba, 10, was first abducted in November 2005 and held for 20 days. His family paid FCFA 900,000 for his release. He was again abducted in January 2006 and spent 13 days in captivity. His father paid FCFA 500,000 for his release. Ahmadou Buba, 25, was first abducted in March 2006 and his father paid FCFA 700,000 for his release. He was again abducted in May 2006. Abdou Buba, 14, was abducted in July 2006 and his father paid a ransom of FCFA 770,000 for his release. In all, Djafun Buba paid over FCFA 3 million in ransom money. Djafun told AI researchers that, at the time of Karim Buba's abduction in September 2006, at least 50 other children were abducted. Djafun and other parents were severely beaten by the Zaraguinas each time they went to pay the ransom and collect their children from them.



Figure 6 Karim Buba ©AI

In some cases, Zaraguinas burned family homes, destroyed and/or looted property as they abducted children and other people. For example, Bisseifou Guidado's 26-year-old son, **Ngabou Guidado**, was abducted in April 2005, and their family home in Boguila, Ouham-

Pende, was set ablaze. On the same day, many more children were kidnapped and many homes were burned by Zaraguinas. After one week the family paid FCFA 1.05 million for Ngabou's release. Ngabou's 17-year-old cousin, **Koridjo Imoussa**, was also abducted and released after payment of FCFA 1.4 million. Bisseifou Guidado's family did not report the abductions to the authorities because they knew the security forces had never shown any interest in pursuing Zaraguinas.

Many victims of abduction are girls. **Fatimatou Adamou**, 16, was abducted in May 2005 and her father, Ibrahim Adamou paid a ransom of FCFA 500,000 for her release. Her two brothers were also abducted during the same period. Ibrahim Adamou and other parents whose young girls were abducted were adamant that their daughters had not been sexually abused or raped. Most likely the result of pervasive stigma against raped girls and women, the parents of the abducted girls claimed that the fetishes used by Zaraguinas to protect them against "bad luck" would be rendered ineffective if they engaged in rape and other sexual crimes.

Ousmane Bi Yunusa's two daughters, **Amina Bi Yunusa**, 9, and **Fatimatou Bi Yunusa**, 5, were kidnapped by the Zaraguinas. Amina was kidnapped in October 2006 from her home in Lima and held for two months. The father paid FCFA 400,000 for her release. According to the father the Zaraguinas did not maltreat her but she lost weight and became very shy when she returned to her home. The father sold six bulls to obtain the money for the ransom. Fatimatou, 5, was kidnapped in January 2007 and her father paid FCFA 30,000 ransom after selling the only cow that remained in his possession. She spent one month in captivity in the bush.



Figure 7 Amina Bi Yunusa and Fatimatou Bi Yunusa ©AI

Ali Bouba, 10, was first abducted in 2004 for three days. On this occasion her parents' house was also pillaged and her father **Djaoudo Bouba Bi Alim** was beaten. The family paid FCFA 1.05 million. She was taken for a second time in 2005, and this time her father paid a FCFA 500,000 ransom. The third abduction was in June 2005, and her father paid FCFA 400,000. This last time, she spent eight days in the hands of the Zaraguinas. According to her father she was not maltreated. The family sold their cattle to pay the ransom and crossed the border to seek refuge in Chad.

In January 2007, more than 50 alleged Zaraguinas in military camouflage, with faces covered in turbans, are reported to have launched a heavy offensive against the residents of Voudou village along the Bozoum - Bossangoa axis. The Zaraguinas reportedly killed four civilians. Four women had been raped by Zaraguinas in the same village in December 2006.

Bandits waylay travellers and rob them of money and other possessions. The bandits often force the travellers to remove all their clothes, carry out body searches for any items that they may be hiding and take their victims' clothes. Travellers who try to flee are often shot and wounded or killed. It has been reported that, in some cases, the bandits are dressed in military uniform, making it difficult for their victims to know whether they are bandits or members of the armed forces.

Ali Oumar, 20, told Amnesty International researchers that he was travelling on a truck to buy a motorcycle in Mbaimou, Cameroon, when he and his fellow passengers fell into a Zaraguina ambush at Limouna. An armed man in military uniform suddenly appeared on the road and shot into the air. The driver stopped the truck. In the ensuing panic, a fellow passenger pushed Oumar, who fell to the ground. Apparently believing that he would escape unnoticed as the bandits robbed the passengers of their money and other valuables, the driver tried to start the truck and flee but one of the bandits stopped him and took the key from him. The bandits robbed Oumar of FCFA 400,000. The driver snatched the key from the bandit and this time he was able to drive off but left behind his assistant and the passengers. The bandits shot at the truck but the driver escaped. The bandits shot his assistant dead as the passengers fled into the surrounding bush. Oumar was himself shot in the wrist. The bandits captured and abducted several of the passengers. One of those abducted was a woman, **Moussa Fanée**. Oumar believed that the bandits were still holding her in May 2007. Her family failed to pay the ransom demanded by the bandits. Fearing attacks by government soldiers and harassment by members of armed political groups in and around Paoua, Oumar and several members of his family, including his elder sister, Fadimatou Oumar, 24, fled to Chad at the start of May 2007. AI met the family at Bekoninga border post as they waited to be transferred to a refugee camp.

Most of the abductees appear to be members of the Mbororo ethnic group. They are targeted by the Zaraguina because they are pastoralists who can sell the cattle to pay ransoms

that peasant farmers could not afford. Some of the victims are adults and children looking after cattle grazing in the bush.

Those abducted while looking after cattle include **Manou bi Hassane**. His father, **Hassane Galma**, narrated his ordeal to AI. Manou has two wives and nine children. He had been abducted seven times while looking after cattle away from home in Yaloke near Bossangoa. The sums paid each time to the bandits for Manou's release ranged from FCFA 150,000 to FCFA 500,000. In all, the family paid over FCFA 2 million to the bandits after selling all the cattle they owned. Hassane Galma said that some of the abductees whose relatives failed to pay ransoms were killed. One such victim was **Jayé Boub**a who was killed near Yaloke.

Aliou Abdoullahi, 34, had the first encounter with Zaraguinas in April 2005. He and his family were attending to their cattle in the bush when nine Zaraguinas armed with automatic weapons surrounded them. They demanded that he pay them FCFA 2 million. When he offered to pay FCFA 500,000 they beat him and threatened to kill him. After lengthy negotiations, punctuated by beatings, the Zaraguina reduced their demand to FCFA 1.3 million, which Aliou Abdoullahi agreed to pay after selling his cows. They took his 7-year-old daughter, **Hagara Aliou**, to be released when he paid the ransom. He sold more than 30 cows to raise the full amount. His daughter was freed after he paid.

A short while later the Zaraguinas returned, but the family managed to escape from their encampment. The Zaraguinas returned again in July 2006 and abducted his son, **Nour Abdoullahi**. Nour was released five months later in January 2007 after payment of FCFA 500,000. At that point, Aliou Abdoullahi was left with only two cows. The family left the pastures and moved to Paoua town. Two weeks later, Zaraguinas arrived at his house in the middle of the night and abducted him, along with a group of other people. On arrival at the Zaraguina encampment, Aliou recognized some of the Zaraguinas as having been among those who had abducted his children. He told them that he would never be able to pay because he had already sold all his cows to pay ransoms for his children. They released him but continued to hold some 13 others, including **Aladji Yari**, an elderly blind man, and his son, **Kessi Yari**. Aliou told AI that Aladji Yari and his son could have paid their ransom but their cows were in a zone that was cut off from Paoua by armed groups. He believed his fellow abductees were still being held by Zaraguinas in May 2007. Soon after his release, Aliou Abdoullahi decided to flee to Chad with his family.

Some victims have been abducted in revenge for anti-Zaraguina activities by members of their families. A Mbororo community leader, **Souley Garga**, had been encouraging members of his community to organise themselves against bandits. A group of bandits reportedly sent him a message to the effect that they would abduct members of his family if he did not stop his hostility towards them. In October 2006, the bandits raided his home in Paoua town and abducted his wife, **Bimbi Gando**, and his brother, **Hussein Souley**. The bandits shot his brother during the raid and took away his wife. Bimbi was released in April 2007 when Souley Garga reportedly paid a ransom of FCFA 4 million.

Ousmane Garga, 33, was among those kidnapped by Zaraguinas at the same time as Souley's wife. He told AI that he was taken from his home in Paoua. **Hassane Garga**, 25, was trying to flee when the bandits shot him dead. From a group of 23 initially abducted, the Zaraguinas took away seven and released the others. It appears that they took a smaller number because they would be easier to control. Ousmane Garga said that he and his fellow captives were made to walk for one month to a Zaraguina hideout between Bocaranga and Bouar. Ousmane himself was held for three months and 10 days. He was released after his family sold all his cattle to raise a ransom of FCFA 2 million. He said that his three brothers, **Husseini Garga**, **Djibrilla Garga** and **Ramatou Garga** were among those still being held by Zaraguinas in May 2007. Their abductors had demanded a ransom of FCFA 9 million.

Damao bi Bouba was looking after his cattle in the bush when Zaraguinas attacked him. They abducted his son, **Souleye Bouba**, and killed two of his uncles. Damao sold six cows to raise a ransom of FCFA 400,000. When Souleye was abducted, his grandfather, **Bouba bi Kassimi**, tried to fight them off. The Zaraguinas went away, reorganized and came back. They shot the grandfather dead. The Zaraguinas took away a third relative to Yaloke and killed him. The uncles killed were **Bouba Issa bi Kassimi** and **Samaki bi Kassimi**. As he fled from the Zaraguinas, members of an armed group shot Damao in the right foot. He explained to AI that, as he was trying to cross to Chad, he came across a young boy herding cattle. Seeing a stranger, the boy apparently mistook Damao for a Zaraguina or other cattle thief. The boy fled to the village, which was apparently under the protection of an armed group. The armed group pursued and shot Damao. When his relatives learned that he had been attacked and wounded, they came to Beboula and took him to hospital for treatment.

Until recently, representatives of humanitarian organizations have generally been spared attacks by armed bandits. However, this appears to have changed in recent months. For example, seven workers of the United Nations Office in the CAR⁸ (*Bureau des Nations unies en Centrafrique*, BONUCA) travelling in two vehicles were attacked near Sibut town on 26 May 2007. According to BONUCA, the victims were ill-treated and their property, including clothes and money, were stolen by the bandits. Seven days earlier, on 19 May, two workers of an Italian humanitarian organization, COOPI (*Cooperazione Internazionale*), were abducted by Zaraguinas on the road between Bozoum and Bocaranga. The workers were released on 29 May 2007.

Most members of the families of abducted children fear to report the abductions to the authorities or to seek assistance from the security forces for fear of Zaraguina reprisals. Only a few of the witnesses that Amnesty International researchers spoke to were aware of some families who had felt able to report abductions to the authorities. One such witness was **Ahmadou Bi Daoudou** and his neighbours who, in June 2004, reported to a FACA unit that they had been attacked by Zaraguinas and showed the unit the direction taken by the attackers.

⁸ BONUCA is also known as the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic.

When the soldiers left the village, members of the Zaraguinas returned and killed **Koreidjo**, a resident of the village, with his children **Male Bi Kadouna**, 25, **Yousoufa Bi Yougouda**, 7, **Karim Bi Massoudo**, 17 and **Husseini Bi Seifou**, 15. Fearing further reprisals, Ahmadou Bi Daoudou fled to Chad.

6. Chadians join the northern lawlessness

Chadian government soldiers are reported to have carried out incursions into northern CAR under the pretext of assisting FACA to beat off offensives by armed political groups or protecting their territory from incursions by Chadian armed political groups using the CAR as a springboard. In the process, the Chadian soldiers have carried out attacks on unarmed civilians. Armed Chadian pastoralists are also reported to have attacked CAR peasant farmers and/or destroyed their crops, obviously without fear of being stopped or prosecuted by CAR officials.

Sources in southern Chad and in northern CAR, who wished to remain anonymous for security reasons, told Amnesty International researchers that they had witnessed military movements from Chad to northern CAR. According to the witnesses interviewed by AI, Chadian military convoys regularly crossed into the CAR, including in December 2006.

During their visit to Bangui and southern Chad, AI learned from local civil society and international humanitarian organizations working in northern CAR that Chadian pastoralists deliberately let their animals destroy CAR peasants' crops. There were numerous cases of the pastoralists feeding their cows on food in the local people's granaries or houses. The CAR authorities took no action to protect CAR civilians and their property. Some of the witnesses interviewed by AI said that the CAR authorities failed to take action against Chadians because the CAR government was dependent on Chadian soldiers for its survival in power.

Talé village, which is situated some 36km south of Markounda, is reported to have been partially burned down by Chadian pastoralists on 15 June 2006. The pastoralists also killed a man from Talé and burned a blind woman in her house. In Botongo village, 46km south of Markounda, Chadian pastoralists are reported to have killed a local chief's wife. Local people killed six pastoralists in reprisal. The pastoralists are reported to have crossed back to Chad, armed themselves and carried out revenge attacks on Talé, which was less populated than Botongo.

As well as being armed themselves, the pastoralists were often also supported by Chadian government soldiers. Local government officials who claim to be trying to arrest or force the Chadians out of CAR territory, justify Chadian incursions on the existence of an agreement between the CAR and Chadian governments to pursue their respective armed opponents into each other's territory.

7. Conclusion

The people of the Central African Republic, particularly the northern region, have borne the brunt of lawlessness and a vacuum of state authority since the 1980s. The situation over the past two years has been exacerbated by the armed conflict between government forces and armed political groups seeking to overthrow the government. Some of the fighting appears to have its origin in the failure of the state to fulfil its constitutional and international obligations to protect its population.

Human rights violations by government forces have continued under successive CAR governments, including the current one. Suspected perpetrators of human rights abuses who have been publicly named by the media, by local human rights organizations and by members of the National Assembly, have continued to enjoy impunity. Armed political groups have attacked unarmed civilians and/or used them as human shields. Armed bandits comprising Zaraguinas from the CAR, from neighbouring countries and from as far away as West Africa have taken advantage of the vacuum of authority and the weakness of the CAR state to terrorise and unlawfully kill unarmed civilians and pillage their property. Chadian government troops also cross into the CAR and commit human rights violations with impunity. Unarmed civilians who survive attacks by government soldiers and members of armed political groups, fall into the hands of ruthless criminal gangs.

In May 2007, several CAR government officials told Amnesty International's researchers that their government did not have sufficient capacity or resources to adequately protect the population in the north. The officials told the researchers that their government had not received a positive response when it requested that the UN deploy a peacekeeping force in northern CAR. AI has also concluded that the CAR government has limited will and inadequately trained forces to establish the rule of law in much of its territory. If the current turmoil in northern CAR continues unchecked for much longer, instability and violence will worsen in the country. The victims will largely be the civilians of the CAR, but their plight will have a direct and adverse impact on the human rights situation in other central African countries, especially but not limited to the Sudan, Chad and Cameroon, which have common borders with the CAR. The time to act is now; any further delays are likely to have catastrophic consequences.

A total collapse of law and order in northern CAR would have a devastating effect on regional peace, security and human rights. Hence, the CAR government must do its utmost to protect its people. Given the government's limited capacity, expertise and resources, governments and intergovernmental organizations must help protect the people of the CAR. At the 2005 World Summit, heads of state recognised that: 'Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.' At the same time, the outcome document from the summit stressed

the responsibility of the international community, through the United Nations, to help protect populations from those crimes.⁹

8. Recommendations

Under international law, parties to an armed conflict have a responsibility to take all feasible steps to ensure the protection of civilians. Deliberately targeting civilians in a situation of armed conflict is a violation of international humanitarian law. It is a war crime. In some circumstances it could constitute a crime against humanity.

Protection of civilians

CAR government and armed groups:

- The CAR government must ensure that its security forces respect the government's obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, in particular those laws relating to the protection of civilians, and ensure that civilians are never arbitrarily nor indiscriminately targeted.
- The armed groups operating and/or based in the CAR must respect their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, in particular those laws relating to the protection of civilians, and ensure that civilians are never arbitrarily nor indiscriminately targeted.

The government of the CAR should:

- Take all effective measures to protect civilians, including the internally displaced persons living in northern CAR, from attacks by armed groups and bandits. It must ensure that its forces conduct themselves in accordance with international human rights standards at all times and in all places;
- Seek the assistance of the UN to enhance its protection capacity, for example through the deployment in northern CAR of an international force, as may be necessary for the protection of civilians, including children and the internally displaced persons;
- Take all effective measures to prevent further abduction of children and other people in northern CAR. Abductions must be subject to independent, impartial investigations and those responsible brought to justice;

⁹ The content of the outcome document was reaffirmed by the Security Council in its Resolution 1674 (2006).

- Establish an independent, fair and effective vetting process for members of the FACA, especially the members of the Presidential Guard, to ensure that those reasonably suspected of crimes under international law or human rights abuses are not part of these forces, pending independent and impartial investigations.

The African Union should:

- Put pressure on the government of the CAR to carry out its primary responsibility to protect civilians in northern CAR, including all displaced persons;
- Ensure that AU Member States contribute well-screened and disciplined units to a UN force in northern CAR, with a strong mandate and the capacity to patrol northern CAR and to protect civilians.

The UN Security Council should:

- Authorize the deployment of an international presence in the CAR mandated to effectively protect civilians, including the internally displaced persons and children. In addition to the necessary military and civilian police components, this presence should have strong human rights, gender, and child protection components and should be provided with sufficient resources to perform the mandate entrusted to it. The human rights component should include sufficient human rights monitors with the mandate and capacity to monitor, investigate and make periodic public reports on the human rights situation.
- Make sure that personnel deployed as part of this international presence adhere strictly to the United Nations Code of Conduct, and that, with respect to personnel performing acts in violation of such a code or otherwise committing criminal acts, disciplinary action is taken in order to ensure full accountability.
- Take steps to ensure the security and protection of IDPs in accordance with relevant international standards, including the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; ensure the freedom of movement of civilians.

Donor governments should:

- Ensure that UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations have sufficient funds and other resources to adequately assist CAR refugees and IDPs. Refugees and IDPs should not be allowed to find themselves in a desperate situation that leads them to return to areas in the CAR where they are at risk of serious human rights abuses.

Ending impunity for international crimes

The government of the CAR should:

- Ensure that any members of the FACA, including the Presidential Guard, who have committed crimes under international law, including crimes of murder, torture and other ill-treatment, rape, looting and destruction of property, are brought to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty;
- Invite the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, the representatives of the UN Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons and on children in armed conflict, the Special Rapporteur on refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights – to visit the CAR;
- Ensure that allegations of rape and sexual violence committed by any armed group or members of government forces are promptly, thoroughly and independently investigated; the findings of such investigations should be made public; those responsible for carrying out, ordering or acquiescing in rape and sexual violence should be brought to justice in trials that meet international standards of fairness. The safety of victims and witnesses should be protected;
- Implement the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court promptly; and in the event that the government of the CAR is at the present time unable to bring to justice those who have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in northern CAR, it should refer these crimes to the ICC to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice and victims receive prompt and fair reparation.

The UN Security Council should:

- Urge the CAR to investigate and prosecute all those crimes under national and international law being committed in northern CAR;
- Refer the situation in the CAR to the ICC Prosecutor, in the event that the government of the CAR fails to take prompt and effective action to bring those suspected of war crimes or crimes against humanity to justice or to refer the case to the ICC.

The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court should:

- Immediately take steps to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the CAR since October 2002, when the country ratified the Rome Statute.

Ending violence against children

The government of the CAR should:

- Formulate a detailed action plan to provide for the protection of children from abduction and other forms of violence. The government should work in close co-operation with UN experts and with the participation of civil society and organizations that work to protect children;
- Take steps to thoroughly investigate cases of abduction of children in order to identify, apprehend and bring the perpetrators to justice;
- Ensure that this action plan is fully integrated into all measures, including the deployment of forces, to protect civilians, including IDPs and refugees;
- Take measures to provide all victims of violence with access to medical treatment including psychological support.

The UN Security Council should:

- Ensure that a future international presence in the CAR has a strong child protection component and gives a high priority to the protection of children.

9. Glossary

APRD	Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (<i>Armée populaire pour la restauration de la démocratie</i>)
AU	African Union
BONUCA	United Nations Office in the CAR (<i>Bureau des Nations Unies en Centrafrique</i>)
CAR	Central African Republic
CEMAC	Economic Community of Central African States (<i>Communauté économique des Etats d'Afrique centrale</i>)
COOPI	Italian humanitarian organization, <i>Cooperazione Internazionale</i>
FACA	Central African Armed Forces (<i>Forces armées Centrafricaines</i>)
FCFA	Currency of the Central African Republic
FOMUC	Multinational Forces in the CAR (<i>Forces multinationales en Centrafrique</i>)
FUC	United Front for Change (<i>Front uni pour le changement</i>)
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MLC	Movement for the Liberation of Congo (<i>Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo</i>)
MSF	Medical charity (<i>Médecins sans frontières</i>)
Presidential Guard	Government forces directly responsible to President François Bozizé (<i>Garde présidentielle</i>)
UFDR	Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (<i>Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement</i>)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Zaraguinas	Armed bandits (<i>coupeurs de route</i>)

Map of the CAR

