

The Statement of Under Secretary-General/Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, on the Human Rights and Humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic

1 November 2013

Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

I thank the Permanent Missions of France and Rwanda, particularly His Excellency Ambassador Gérard Araud and His Excellency Ambassador Eugène-Richard Gasana, for convening this meeting to exchange ideas on the very dire human rights and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. I also applaud the Security Council for approving the deployment of military personnel to protect United Nations personnel and facilities in the Central African Republic. The physical presence of the United Nations in the Central African Republic is more required now than ever before.

Your Excellencies, I, my predecessor Francis Deng and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect have been following the situation in the Central African Republic since 2011, particularly in the volatile areas in the northern part of the country that have been plagued with instability for years. The situation has been characterized by widespread violations of human rights and has deteriorated significantly in the last year, culminating to the current human rights and humanitarian crisis. Urgent action is required now to stop the on-going serious and widespread violations of human rights that are being committed with impunity against the civilian population and the increase in sectarian attacks across the country.

My Office has been receiving consistent and reliable reports of widespread acts of sexual violence committed against women and children; extrajudicial killing of civilians; enforced disappearances; arbitrary arrests, detention and torture; as well as the destruction and looting of property, including hospitals, schools and churches. Séléka elements and self-defence militias are responsible for most of these atrocious acts against the civilian population. Given the widespread and unchecked nature of these violations in the Central African Republic, I believe that they could constitute crimes against humanity or war crimes.

It is further alarming that the same armed elements who are committing these atrocities are now inciting violence between Christians and Muslims in the country. As we know, the country is already facing deep ethnic divisions as most of the decisions or actions by the government and other leading actors are seen through the lens of ethnicity. The religious element of the prevailing divisions in the country is a perfect powder keg that could drive the Central African Republic to the brink. We know that incitement to commit violence on the basis of religion or ethnicity, as well as deliberate attacks against a group on this basis, is factors that indicate a high risk that atrocity crimes are on-going or imminent.

The current situation in the country is appalling and it is not enough simply to condemn the atrocities being committed. We cannot afford to let armed elements continue to murder, maim, pillage and rape Central Africans as we stand by and simply condemn what is happening.

Whereas the primary responsibility to protect populations lies with the Central African authorities themselves, there is no doubt that the transitional government is manifestly failing to prevent Séléka and other armed groups from perpetrating these atrocities. It is also very clear that there has been no attempt to prevent or curb incitement to commit violence along sectarian lines. In the face of this failure of the State, the international community must take concrete measures to stop the abuses and protect the civilian population.

The forces of the Economic Community of Central African States (MICOPAX), which amount to some 1,100 military personnel, have been unable to deal with the crisis in the country. Whereas we welcome the decision of the African Union to establish a regional peacekeeping force for the Central African Republic (African Union Mission in Central Africa Republic, known as MISCA) with an additional strength of 3,600 peacekeepers, it will take several months before these troops are on the ground.

I acknowledge that the international community is deeply engaged with other crisis situations around the world but we must not forget the suffering of the people of the Central African Republic, particularly women and children who are in desperate need of protection. The pledge Member States made in 2005 World Summit Outcome to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity must be honoured in the face of the risk of atrocity crimes against Central Africans.

It is as matter of urgency that the international community supports the deployment of the African led force in order to prevent this crisis from deepening further. It is of course important that any regional or international force deployed in the Central African Republic should have a strong protection mandate and the resources necessary to implement it

The newly established United Nations protection force should quickly be deployed on the ground to ensure that United Nations staff in the country can reach the affected population. The presence of the United Nations in the country is very much required, not only to reassure the population of international concern but also to facilitate delivery of humanitarian assistance and undertake protection activities.

The national transitional authorities must rein in Séléka elements and self-defense militia and hold those responsible for committing atrocities accountable. There can be no excuses or justification for condoning impunity. The articles of the African Union Constitutive Act on non-impunity and other international standards are applicable to the situation in the Central African Republic. If we let perpetrators operate as if they are above national and international laws, then we are betraying the victims of the on-going atrocities. I urge the relevant bodies, including the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council to immediately establish an independent commission of inquiry to establish the extent of the atrocities being committed and identify those suspected of being behind the violence.

In addition, there should be concerted efforts to promote a national peace process, including peace forums at the community level. There is urgent need for dialogue between Christians and Muslims and for measures to be taken by those in positions of authority, including political, religious and community leaders, to mitigate the existing ethnic divisions in the country. The transitional authorities should ensure equitable representation and participation in the government. The perceptions of exclusion and marginalization will only exacerbate the fragmentation and the conflict in the country.

Central African Republic is also a member of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the ICGLR and most important, it is a signatory to the organization's protocol on the prevention and punishment of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and all forms of discrimination. My Office stands ready to work with the ICGLR and the transitional authorities to strengthen capacities to prevent atrocity crimes.

As members of the international community, let us do everything within our means to give hope to those who are currently faced with one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crises of our time. The people of the Central African Republic have been suffering in the shadows, while attention has focused elsewhere. We must take our responsibilities seriously with regards to the protection of this population. Another day of routine abuse or killing is heartbreaking.

Thank you.

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