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International Federation
for Human Rights

Federación Internacional
de los Derechos Humanos

الفدرالية الدولية لحقوق الإنسان

Executive summary

Central African Republic: Report of an International Fact-finding Mission

Forgotten, stigmatised: the double suffering of victims of international crimes

Paris, October 12, 2006 – FIDH published the investigative report “*Forgotten, stigmatised: the double suffering of victims of international crimes*” which is a compilation of the information published in its previous reports on the Central African Republic (CAR)¹ and which reproduces the findings of the International Investigative Mission carried out in the capital, Bangui, from 10 to 17 June 2006.

The Central African Republic a prey to waves of violence

The report shows that the history of CAR is characterised by a succession of waves of violence, both political and military, the common denominator and trigger for which is the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of the most serious crimes. Leaders have gone to war for a power which has, for a long time, been devoid of any substance as the State is in decay, society is in a coma and the economy is a disaster. The many conflicts have caused the country's development index rating to tumble. Nevertheless, the presidential palace is still an object of desire.

General Bozizé's coup and the impunity of the perpetrators of crimes against the civilian population

Between October 2002 and March 2003, the loyalist forces of President Ange-Félix Patassé, with the help of the Congolese mercenaries of Jean-Pierre Bemba and Abdoulaye Miskine's Chadians, confronted the rebel army of General Bozizé, the former Chief of Staff of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) who was in exile for being behind an earlier attempted coup in 2001. The first part of the report gives a summary of this conflict and the serious crimes (murder, summary execution, rape, sexual violence, looting) committed at the time by the combatants against the civilian population. It gives an account of the “*incapacity of the Central African courts*” to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice and the referral of the case by the CAR Court of Cassation to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Despite being informed by FIDH in February 2003 and having received a referral from the Central African government in December 2004, the ICC Prosecutor has still not decided when an investigation into the situation in CAR will be opened.

¹ See the following FIDH reports: Report no. 355 “War crimes in the Central African Republic”, February 2003; Report no. 382 “Quelle justice pour les victimes de crimes de guerre”, February 2004; and Report no. 410 “The political transition closes against a backdrop of impunity”, February 2005.

Rebellions against Bozizé's regime and further crimes

President Bozizé who came to power by force and then “legalised” his position by holding an election, is himself now confronted by rebel groups seeking to “*destabilise the Bangui regime*”.

There have, in fact, been rebellions in the North-west of the country since September 2005, with, in particular, the attacks on Markounda, Bossangoa, Kabo, Bémal and Paoua by the APRD (*Armée populaire pour la restauration de la République and la démocratie*). The civilian population suffered violence at the hands of the FACA in retaliation for these murderous attacks. Jean-Jacques Larmassoum, a spokesman for the APRD, who was arrested and later sentenced to life imprisonment in August 2006, was said to have been acting under the orders of former President Patassé.

In the North-east of the country, the FACA were battling with other Central African and Chadian rebels, in particular with those who were known to have taken part in the attempted coup on N'djamena in April 2006, backed by the Khartoum regime. According to the Central African authorities, Abdoulaye Miskine was an accomplice in these rebellions and should soon be sentenced in absentia by the Bangui Criminal Court.

From the evidence of victims, various FIDH interviews with Central African authorities and UN agencies, but also through the prism of the first criminal proceedings instigated by the Prosecutor of the Republic, the second part of the report presents these new rebellions in northern CAR, highlights their vague political and military impulses and dissects the official version of their alleged external supporters, commanders and accomplices.

This part shows that most of the alleged perpetrators of crimes committed in 2002 and 2003 were participants in the new conflict, which is convincing evidence of the impunity that is rife in the country.

The double suffering of victims

The civilian population is the main victim of this chaotic history. It has suffered continual attacks from the warring parties, both rebel and loyalist. Women, men, children and elderly people have been raped, children born of rape, people infected with the Aids virus, people with limbs amputated, children orphaned, family members assassinated, people have become refugees or displaced persons, malnutrition is rife. There are many who bear the stigma of this ravaged country. Part three of the report highlights the double suffering of the many victims of the conflicts in CAR. Attacked both physically and mentally, these victims suffer both from their stigmatisation in Central African society and from the general indifference towards their situation of extreme physical, social and economic distress.

The inertia of the international community

For some time now the international community has shown little interest in a country which has yet to reveal all its natural wealth. Up till now, war-torn CAR has provoked mere diplomatic condemnations, mainly of the attempted coup in 2001 and the takeover by force in 2003. The only involvement of the international community in this country is evidenced by the few hundred soldiers from CEMAC (*Communauté Economique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale*) and renewals of BONUCA's (*Bureau des Nations unies en RCA*) “peace-building” mandate. The appearance, since 2005, of new rebel groups in northern CAR has changed the situation slightly with the logistical intervention of France in support of the FACA and the concerned gaze of the UN Security Council. But the insecurity in CAR seems to worry them more regarding the crystallisation of Chado-Sudanese antagonism rather than its effect on Bangui and the Central African people.

FIDH launches an appeal to the International Criminal Court, the victims' last hope

Abandoned by the Central African justice system, the victims have, nevertheless, had the courage to organise themselves and, despite gibes and threats, cling to the hope that international justice will shatter this destructive indifference and restore their dignity. This report is also an urgent appeal to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to open, at last, an investigation into the situation in CAR and help, at least, curb the recurrent waves of fighting in this country which should not be seen as inevitable. The

States parties to the Statute of Rome have confirmed that the most serious crimes affecting the international community as a whole, should not go unpunished. They are determined to put an end to the impunity of the perpetrators of these crimes and thus to work towards the prevention of further crimes. FIDH believes that the ICC Prosecutor must seize this opportunity to be equal to his mandate.