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EU Foreign Affairs Council on Central African Republic

Ahead of the 14-15 April Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), Amnesty International calls on the European Union (EU) and its member states to act urgently to bring stability to the Central African Republic (CAR). The newly launched EUFOR RCA military operation must be robust and well-resourced in order to immediately assist the existing peacekeeping troops on the ground. EU and international efforts are also necessary to ensure much-needed financial and logistical support reaches the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA). This will be essential for MISCA to live up to its mandate to protect civilians in all parts of the country until the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping mission deploys following the recent adoption of UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 2194 (2014).¹

From December 2012, the Seleka armed group spread out across the country, seizing the capital Bangui and ousting then-President François Bozizé in March 2013. Over the following 10 months, Seleka forces killed countless civilians, burned numerous villages, and looted thousands of homes. Seleka abuses spurred the emergence of the loosely organised “anti-balaka”, made up of Christians and animists opposed to Seleka rule. In the last four months, anti-balaka fighters have carried out horrific attacks on Muslim communities, particularly in north-western CAR. In town after town, when the Seleka left, the anti-balaka militia moved in and launched violent attacks against the Muslim minority.

Anti-balaka fighters are now the main perpetrators of violence, especially in Bangui and in the western third of the country. Seleka forces that retreated to the north also continue to commit serious human rights abuses in the territory under their control. There is currently no functioning justice system in CAR, with little or no possibility of police investigations, court proceedings, and incarceration. This has resulted in total impunity for human rights violations.

In recent months, ethnic cleansing of CAR’s Muslim population has resulted in a forced exodus of tens of thousands of Muslim civilians to neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Much of this newly-created refugee population is living in makeshift camps where conditions are dire.² With the rainy season approaching, the already desperate situation will quickly deteriorate unless shelter, food and medical facilities are urgently made available for them. Most of the camps where these people stay are too close to the border, contributing to increasing insecurity and vulnerability of refugees.

The few thousand Muslims who remain in the capital and the western part of the country (where they used to represent about 15 percent of the population) are nearly all displaced. There are still more than 650,000 internally displaced people inside CAR.

Thousands of Seleka fighters are still cantoned (but not yet disarmed) in military camps in Bangui and are expecting to benefit from a Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process. While some anti-balaka are willing to disarm if they benefit from a similar package as the Seleka, radical

¹ UNSC resolution 2194 (2014), <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2014/sc11349.doc.htm>. See also: Press release, *CAR: EU and African leaders must not fail the people of Central African Republic*, 2 April 2014. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/eu-and-african-leaders-must-not-fail-people-central-african-republic-2014-04-02>

² Press Release, *Refugees Fleeing Violence In The Central African Republic Face New Conflict In Chad*, 5 March 2014. <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/chad-refugees-fleeing-violence-central-african-republic-face-new-conflict-chad>

leaders of both armed groups have told their members to keep fighting. Along with former police and *gendarmerie* forces, some of the former army (Forces Armées Centrafricaines or FACA) have agreed to reintegrate their positions under the supervision of international peacekeepers in Bangui. However, others have formed a new armed group called Renewal and Justice (RJ) that now controls a huge territory along the border with Cameroon and Chad.

Several areas of Bangui have increasingly come under the control of the anti-balaka militias, who have (especially since 22 March 2014) launched repeated attacks on civilians and MISCA. The rest of the country generally remains out of control, as the government has no authority outside Bangui and relies on international peacekeepers.

On April 10, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2194 (2014) creating the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and paving the way for the deployment of 10,000 troops and 1800 police. Full transfer of authority from MISCA to the new UN force is expected on 15 September 2014. Currently, international forces in CAR are comprised of around 5,000 African Union peacekeepers (MISCA) and 2,000 French troops (Sangaris). Yet these forces failed to deploy swiftly outside Bangui to protect civilians. On 1 April, the EU launched a military operation of up to 1,000 troops (EUFOR-RCA) to be deployed shortly in Bangui; this would allow the redeployment of international troops already present there to go to other provinces. EUFOR RCA is intended as a “bridging mission” until the UN peacekeeping operation can deploy in the CAR.

Today, Amnesty International is calling on the EU and its member states to:

- Accelerate the deployment of EUFOR RCA and ensure it is robust and well-resourced to assist existing peacekeeping troops on the ground
- Provide MISCA and other international peacekeeping forces with timely and sufficient resources to enhance their capacity to rapidly deploy in all regions of the country in order to protect civilians effectively, especially in and around IDP sites and remote towns where Muslims are still present
- Ensure smooth coordination among all military forces present in CAR, including EUFOR RCA, MISCA and Sangaris.
- Act to ensure the prompt reconstitution of the judiciary and other justice bodies, including courts, prisons, and prosecutorial agencies; likewise, support with full financial, technical, logistic and political backing any initiatives reinforcing human rights monitoring in CAR.