



“EVERYTHING WAS IN FLAMES”

THE ATTACK ON A DISPLACED PERSONS
CAMP IN ALINDAO

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



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Cover photo: Former inhabitant of the displaced persons camp in Alindao, newly displaced to Bambari, building a shelter to live in.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 15 November, the same day that the UN Security Council voted to extend the presence of MINUSCA, the UN peacekeeping force in the Central African Republic,¹ a displaced persons camp in the centre of the country was violently attacked. Although the Alindao site was guarded by peacekeepers mandated to protect civilian life, they did not fire a shot to defend the estimated 18,000 civilians taking refuge there.² Instead, the hundreds of attackers faced only fleeting resistance from a group of anti-balaka fighters armed with artisanal rifles.³ Very soon, the anti-balaka fighters fled, and the attackers overran the site.

Those who carried out the 15 November attack – fighters belonging to the Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique, UPC), a Seleka off-shoot, as well as a large crowd of armed Muslim civilians from the area – spent most of the day looting the site, terrorising its inhabitants, and burning nearly all of the shelters to the ground. By evening, somewhere between 70 and 100 people had been killed, all of them civilians, and many of them women, children, older people, and people with disabilities. Numerous victims were burned alive in their homes, their bodies reduced to cinders.

The attack on the Alindao site took place in the context of an ongoing non-international armed conflict, in which thousands of civilians have been killed since December 2013, and more than one million have been displaced. Anti-balaka and former Seleka fighters have committed crimes under international law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Few of those suspected of criminal responsibility have been investigated or apprehended, continuing the cycle of impunity and insecurity.

The 15 November attack reflects the extreme sectarian tensions that exist between Muslims and Christians in Alindao, a medium-sized town located in the country's turbulent Basse-Kotto region. Given brutal incidents that led up to the attack, and the growing perception among the Muslim community that violent anti-balaka fighters were using the displaced persons site as a refuge, the high risk of such an attack was foreseeable. Equally worrying is the fact that unless these problems are addressed, future incidents of violence against civilians are likely there.

The question of how to reconcile Christian and Muslim communities in the Central African Republic is a crucial one, meriting sustained political engagement. But even when operating in climate of intense

¹ The official name of the UN peacekeeping mission is the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). It was first deployed in September 2014, and included many troops that had belonged to the pre-existing regional force known as MISCA. For more information about the history of the UN force, see Amnesty International, *Mandated to protect, equipped to succeed? Strengthening peacekeeping in the Central African Republic*, February 2016, AFR 19/3263/2016. The latest UN Security Council Resolution to extend MINUSCA's mandate – in this case for a month – was adopted on 15 November 2018. UN Security Council Resolution 2446, UN Doc. S/RES/2446 (15 November 2018) (extending MINUSCA's mandate until 15 December 2018).

² The figure of 18,000 displaced people living at the site at the time of the attack is from humanitarian sources. Some press reports spoke of 26,000 people at the site, but that number was dated, and the numbers of people living at the site had fallen recently. Amnesty International interviews, Bambari and Bangui, November/December 2018.

³ The anti-balaka militia are primarily Christian and animist armed groups with a record of killing Muslim civilians in the Central African Republic. They were responsible for a violent wave of ethnic cleansing in early 2014 that resulted in the flight of the majority of Muslims from the western third of the country. See Amnesty International, *Ethnic cleansing and sectarian killings in the Central African Republic*, February 2014, AFR19/XXX/2014. Many anti-balaka rely on traditional machetes and home-made hunting rifles as weapons.

sectarian animosity, as in Alindao, the UN peacekeeping force must take meaningful steps to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians' lives. There are serious questions as to whether this was the case in Alindao

MINUSCA representatives told Amnesty International that, given the large size of the attacking force compared to the small number of peacekeepers, it would have been impossible for peacekeepers to contain the violence.⁴ But it is far from clear that, with their armored vehicles and heavier weapons, the troops could not have taken defensive positions that might have deterred the attack, particularly had they fired warning shots. It is also unclear why reinforcements were not immediately sent to respond to the attack, instead of allowing the attackers to ransack the site for hours. MINUSCA said there was not sufficient time, but some reinforcements might have been sent on an urgent basis from nearby posts in surrounding areas, such as the PK3 post.⁵ Finally, it is of especial concern that peacekeepers were lax in their supervision of the site's security during the months leading up to the attack, thus endangering the civilian population by making an attack much more likely.

In light of these issues, Amnesty International recommends that the United Nations carry out an investigation into the 15 November attack on the displaced persons site in Alindao to assess whether the peacekeepers at the site or nearby could or should have done more to protect the civilian population, both before and during the attack. The investigation should identify lessons, if appropriate, to help guide future UN action in the Central African Republic, and its results should be made public.⁶

Amnesty International's goal in making this call is to strengthen MINUSCA's capacity to protect civilians, not to undermine its mission. Although the peacekeeping force has faltered at times, it has also saved countless lives, and its continued presence in the Central African Republic offers the country its best hope of regaining stability and ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law.

The following briefing is based on 11-day research visit by Amnesty International to the Central African Republic, which took place from 23 November to 4 December 2018. In the town of Bambari and city of Bangui, Amnesty International interviewed 21 former inhabitants of the displaced persons site in Alindao – 20 of them survivors of the 15 November attack – and a Muslim resident of Alindao, as well as a dozen UN staff, humanitarian actors, and religious figures familiar with events in Alindao.

⁴ Email from Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman, MINUSCA, 13 December 2018.

⁵ MINUSCA stated that they "immediately deployed additional troops, including from Bambari, to reinforce its position and ensure security of the IDPs [internally displaced persons]. The first reinforcement arrived 36 hours later in Alindao and three other troop deployments were completed." Email from Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman, MINUSCA, 13 December 2018.

⁶ The issue of transparency and public reporting is crucial. In the past, both in the Central African Republic and elsewhere, the UN has failed to make public its reports of investigations into deficiencies in peacekeeping forces' protection of civilians. For example, the UN commissioned an independent special investigation after MINUSCA was criticized for its response to attacks on civilians in Haute-Kotto, Basse-Kotto, Mbomou, and Haut-Mbomou prefectures—and particularly in the town of Bangassou—in 2017. Rather than publishing the full report of the investigation, however, the UN issued only a short note to correspondents that summarized the report's findings in a few bullet points. See UN Secretary-General, Note to Correspondents on the findings of the Central African Republic Special Investigation, 24 January 2018. In South Sudan, the UN released the executive summary of an important investigation into an incident in which civilians were killed in Malakal, but never released the full report. See UN Secretary-General, Note to Correspondents -- Board of Inquiry Report on Malakal, 5 August 2016.

BACKGROUND TO THE ATTACK

INTERCOMMUNAL TENSIONS AND A CLIMATE OF INSECURITY

The displaced persons camp that was attacked on 15 November, located at the bishopric of the Catholic Church, is the largest such site in Alindao.⁷ On its premises is a temporary operational base staffed with MINUSCA peacekeeping troops.

Like the smaller displaced persons camp at Alindao's Élim church, the Catholic Church site emerged as part of an ad hoc response to a massive wave of communal violence that shook the town in May 2017. Because of violent attacks on local Christians by UPC forces, characterised by summary killings and systematic rape, nearly the entire Christian community fled their homes.⁸ At the same time, Muslims living in villages surrounding Alindao were forced to flee out of fear of being killed by Christian anti-balaka militias. Because of the destruction and pillage carried out at that time, many people living in the town's displaced persons camps no longer have a home to return to, even if they felt secure enough to do so.

By mid-2017, Christians and Muslims in Alindao were largely segregated, with Christians living in displaced persons sites at the two churches, and Muslims living in the Lapala quarter and other neighbourhoods in the centre of town.⁹ While Christians could generally visit the town centre to buy and sell in the market, Muslims did not feel safe to visit the displaced persons site at the Catholic Church. Over time, the Catholic Church site was seen by many as a haven for the anti-balaka militia that carried out brutal attacks on Muslims, particularly those venturing to travel on the roads outside of town.

At the same time that anti-balaka militia were targeting Muslims, the UPC, the primarily Muslim armed group that exercises de facto power in Alindao, was targeting Christians.¹⁰ Inhabitants of the Catholic Church site described being fired upon when they left the site to work in the fields, and said that it was a not infrequent occurrence for the bodies of people believed killed by UPC fighters to be brought back to the site.

⁷ There are other sites in and around the town, including the Élim church site (located near the hospital, sub-prefecture, and main MINUSCA base in the town), the AFAPS site (across from the MINUSCA base), and PK3 (just outside of town).

⁸ To learn more about the violence in 2017, see Amnesty International, "CAR: Civilians facing atrocities in Basse-Kotto as UN protection proves ineffective," 8 September 2017.

⁹ In addition, the AFAPS site and the PK3 site largely house ethnic Peulh herders, a group that has suffered enormous losses during the country's recent years of crisis.

¹⁰ Led by Ali Darass, an ethnic Peulh, the UPC is known as a Peulh armed group. It was established in 2014 after the Seleka's surrender of power in the western part of the country. Many of the Christians interviewed by Amnesty International referred to members of the group as "the Peulhs," or "the Seleka," rather than the UPC.

A survivor of a shooting in early November described the incident to Amnesty International. He said that he was staying in a temporary shelter he had built in the fields during harvest season, when one morning a group of five uniformed UPC fighters showed up:

*I was coming outside, and I saw them. Immediately, one of them shot at my legs—I was hit in the left leg, in the knee. Another pulled out a very long knife to kill me. The one nearest me told him not to kill me. The one who had shot me wanted to shoot me again, but the other stopped him.*¹¹

Rather than kill the man, they stole his money—some 14,500 CFA (about \$25)—and all his belongings. “They took all the food and clothes that were in the cabin,” the man recalled. “They took the children’s clothes, machetes, kitchen utensils, everything.”

ANTI-BALAKA MILITIA AT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SITE

Christians living in the Catholic Church site spoke of the noticeable anti-balaka presence there, including visibly-armed fighters and fighters who carried weapons under their clothing. Some felt that the anti-balaka were a necessary deterrent to UPC attacks; others resented them as criminals who “arrested” people for their own reasons, and whose use of the site as a safe harbour risked provoking UPC retaliation.

“There’s a big problem with the anti-balaka,” a former inhabitant of the site told Amnesty International. “They provoke the Seleka, getting them to attack the site, and then they don’t protect the civilian population.”¹²

Former inhabitants of the site said that since the arrival of the Mauritanian peacekeeping contingent, the anti-balaka militia were bolder than they had been when Burundian troops were based there. All agreed that security standards had fallen considerably. “The Burundian MINUSCA carried out patrols at night,” recalled one former inhabitant, echoing claims that Amnesty International heard uniformly from others. “If they found someone with an arm, they’d confiscate it. The Mauritians don’t do this. They hardly even patrol during the day. They don’t do a serious job.”¹³

He continued: “When the Burundians heard shooting, they’d go investigate, but the Mauritians don’t move.”

Others described how a few months ago an anti-balaka fighter took a weapon from a Mauritanian peacekeeper. Although the weapon was reportedly returned, the incident was seen as indicative of the troops’ weakness and passivity.¹⁴

Numerous interviewees also noted that the previous Burundian peacekeepers were noticeably more robust and aggressive when handling possible incursions by the UPC. Unlike the Mauritians, “they’d fire warning shots in the air to scare the Seleka [UPC], and the Seleka would go away.”¹⁵

The most concerning aspect of the Mauritanian contingent’s tenure at the Catholic Church displaced persons camp was its acquiescence to the continuing presence of anti-balaka fighters and, indeed, its delegation of duties to a group of them. Asked about this problem, MINUSCA denied that its forces allowed the anti-balaka to operate at the camp, pointing out that the camp is huge, making control over it extremely difficult.¹⁶ Certainly, the large size of the camp and its porous nature – the lack of control over entries and exits – seriously hinders the task of keeping out armed fighters. However, the actions of the Mauritanian troops showed that they not only knew of the anti-balaka fighters’ presence, they authorized it. With the apparent consent or possibly involvement of the sub-prefect (a local government authority) and certain Catholic priests, the Mauritanian peacekeepers based at the site assigned some 10 anti-balaka the task of ensuring the site’s security.¹⁷ The head of the group was named Andjilo, from the nearby village of Karama, and his deputies were Outoundou and Opéré. These men carried out “investigations” and even “arrests,”

¹¹ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 29 November 2018.

¹² Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 29 November 2018.

¹³ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 27 November 2018. A letter that Bishop Cyr-Nestor Yapaupa of Alindoa sent to the commander of the Mauritanian contingent in June drew attention to, among other things, the failure of Mauritanian troops to carry out patrols. Letter from Bishop Cyr-Nestor Yapaupa to the commander of the Mauritanian contingent, 4 June 2018 (copy on file with Amnesty International).

¹⁴ Amnesty International interviews, Bambari, 28-29 November 2018.

¹⁵ Amnesty International interview, Bangui, 2 December 2018.

¹⁶ Email from Vladimir Monteiro, spokesman, MINUSCA, 13 December 2018.

¹⁷ Amnesty International interviews, Bambari and Bangui, November/December 2018.

and would help maintain security during food distribution operations. “During food distributions, Andjilo and his men would be there with their arms, and the Mauritians would be there with their arms,” a former camp resident recalled.¹⁸

“They [the anti-balaka security team] were allowed to carry arms, in order to intimidate the others,” another former resident explained.¹⁹

By allowing anti-balaka forces to operate with impunity at what should have been a purely civilian and humanitarian site, the Mauritanian contingent put the civilian population of the site at risk.²⁰ Particularly given the anti-balaka’s deplorable record of violence against Muslims in the region, serious measures should have been taken to prevent the group from exploiting the site as a haven. Indeed, it is unsurprising that a press release issued by the Islamic Community of Alindao in the wake of the attack (essentially aiming to justify it), points directly to the activities of Andjilo and other anti-balaka at the site.²¹

¹⁸ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 29 November 2018.

¹⁹ Amnesty International interview, Bangui, 2 December 2018.

²⁰ See generally International Committee of the Red Cross, *Aide-Mémoire: Operational Guidance on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Sites and Settlements*, July 2018.

²¹ Communauté Islamique d’Alindao, Communiqué de presse, 18 November 2018 (copy on file with Amnesty International).

THE ATTACK ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SITE

PRELUDE TO THE ATTACK ON THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SITE

The attack on the displaced persons site at the Catholic Church was immediately preceded by several killings. On 14 November, the day before the attack, an ethnic Peulh man named Adamou Diallo was killed, likely by anti-balaka fighters, while he was looking for wood about three km outside of town. The next morning, very early, the body of a Christian woman was reportedly brought back to the Catholic Church site; people believed she had been killed by the UPC.

Also in the early morning of 15 November, a motorcycle-taxi driven by a man named Abakar Ali, and carrying two passengers, was ambushed.²² The passengers – the president of the NGO AFAPS and one of his staff – escaped unharmed, but the driver was shot and killed.

It was the return of Abakar Ali's body to the mosque to be washed, in the early morning, that seems to have sparked the outrage that generated the attack. A subsequent press release from the Islamic Community of Alindao also references the killings of five ethnic Peulh women that morning, but Amnesty International was not able to confirm the incident.²³

KILLINGS, LOOTING, AND DESTRUCTION

Those who witnessed the attack on the displaced persons site say that it involved hundreds of attackers, both UPC fighters and armed civilians. The attack began at approximately 8:30 am, with UPC fighters firing mortars and rocket-propelled grenades at the site.

For the first half hour or so, anti-balaka fighters attempted to defend the site, but the actual fighting did not last long. Without taking any casualties, the anti-balaka fled, telling others that they had run out of ammunition, and that everyone had to leave. "The ABs [anti-balaka] told us, run away, run away, run away!! We ran," one man recalled.²⁴

²² According to some accounts, the shooting occurred the previous night.

²³ Communauté Islamique d'Alindao, Communiqué de presse, 18 November 2018 (copy on file with Amnesty International).

²⁴ Amnesty International interview, Bangui, 2 December 2018.

Many who could not escape were killed, including women and children. Especially vulnerable were those who were unable to run, such as old people and people with disabilities. The deliberate killing of civilians not directly participating in hostilities is prohibited by international humanitarian law and is a war crime.²⁵

“The old people didn’t have the strength to flee,” said a man who later helped bury six bodies.²⁶ Three of the dead were old men whom he knew; the other three were old women. He said that five of them had been shot, while one of the men had been killed with a machete.

Georgette, a 37-year-old native of Alindao, lost her mother – Marie, age about 65 – and her daughter – Natasha, age 8. When the attack started, Georgette was out working in the fields with her husband; they fled into the bush when they heard shooting. In their panic, her husband ran in one direction and she ran in another. She found a group of women whom she knew in the forest, and they spent two days hiding there, with nothing to eat. Finally she decided to return to the Catholic Church site. “I was terrified,” she said, “but I went back to the site because my mother and daughter were there, and I was worried about them.”²⁷

“When I returned to the site,” she continued, “I found that my house was totally destroyed—only burning embers were left. The door had been broken down and my mother had been killed on the spot; my child had been shot. A neighbor told me that my mother had already been buried.” She was unable to find her husband, and as of her interview with Amnesty International did not know whether he was alive.

Georgette’s daughter had been shot in the back, with the bullet exiting through her side. Georgette found her in the hospital in Alindao, where the two spent several days waiting for transport to Bambari, whose hospital offered better emergency medical care. But the hospital in Bambari did not succeed in keeping the girl alive. “She died two days ago, on the 25th,” Georgette told Amnesty International.

Georgette’s daughter Natasha was her only child, making the loss all the more devastating. “I don’t want to have any more children,” she insisted. “It’s too late. I’ve lost everything.”

Another young woman described finding the body of her aunt Marie-Claire lying outside, not long after the attack started. “I saw Marie-Claire’s body in front of her house. My house is just behind her house. After I saw her I fled.”²⁸

Two priests were killed in the attack, reportedly while wearing their priestly robes.²⁹ Amnesty International was unable to ascertain whether they were targeted as individuals or for being priests, as the organization did not find any witnesses to their killings.

The attackers also engaged in massive and systematic looting. They emptied the warehouse used by the World Food Programme, and went shelter to shelter stealing people’s personal belongings before setting the shelters on fire. They also robbed the bishop of a large amount of money and two vehicles, although they did not physically harm the bishop or the priests who stayed with him in his home. Some witnesses said that civilian women accompanied the attackers and carried out much of the looting.

Witnesses concur that the peacekeeping troops charged with protecting the site did not fire at the attackers, or even fire in the air to warn them off. Instead, they reportedly abandoned three of the four guard posts stationed around the site, with an armoured vehicle picking up the troops at the beginning of the fighting and delivering them to the larger, more protected base in the centre of the site. The troops were relatively small in number—around 50 men—but had they taken decisive action immediately, at the outset of the attack, they might have mitigated, if not prevented the violence.

By the end of the afternoon, nearly all of the site was a smoking ruin. Except for the brick ecclesiastical and educational buildings, which were still standing (though a few were damaged), nearly every structure had been burnt to the ground. Of the site’s 11 residential sections, all but one or two had been set on fire. The shelters that people had been living in, made of poles and dried vegetation, were highly flammable. Many older people and people with disabilities who could not manage to escape were burned alive.

A person who returned to the site the day after the attack told Amnesty International: “I saw lots of bodies, mostly of people I didn’t know. More than 20 bodies, for sure. Really a lot—lots of old people and disabled people who were burned to death in their houses.”³⁰

²⁵ Geneva Conventions, Common Article 3; International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, Vol. 1: *The Rules*, Rules 1, 89, and 156.

²⁶ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 27 November 2018.

²⁷ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 26 November 2018.

²⁸ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 28 November 2018.

²⁹ The two priests were Fr. Prospère Blaise Mada and Fr. Célestin Ngoumbango. They were the fourth and fifth priests to be killed in the Central African Republic this year.

³⁰ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 28 November 2018.

IN THE WAKE OF THE ATTACK

SURVIVAL AND REBUILDING

The attack emptied the site almost entirely, with many thousands of people fleeing in different directions. Some headed for the forest and spent days without food. Others hid in the fields closer to town. “I stayed in the fields for four days, Thursday to Sunday,” one man said. “We were hungry, and we pulled out manioc roots to cook over the fire and eat.”³¹

Large numbers of people fled to Datoko village, south of Alindao, a known anti-balaka stronghold.

In the immediate wake of the attack MINUSCA sent Burundian peacekeepers from the outskirts of Alindao to secure the site, and the government declared three days of national mourning. National Red Cross volunteers, together with priests, family members, and others, buried dozens of bodies.

People began to return to the site in the days that followed, seeking food and other aid. They began rebuilding their shelters almost immediately, and by the end of November the population of the site had reached well over 10,000 people.

ACCUSATION OF INDISCRIMINATE FIRE

After the 15 November attack, relations between the displaced people and the Mauritanian peacekeepers who remained at the site were tense. Many survivors felt the Mauritians had done nothing to protect them, or had even been complicit in the violence. It seems evident, however, that survivors’ prejudices regarding the Mauritanian peacekeepers’ identity as Muslims played a role in the latter view. Amnesty International found no concrete evidence of such complicity.

On 22 November, an incident took place that led to claims that peacekeepers engaged in indiscriminate fire. The circumstances are unclear – some witnesses believed the Mauritanian troops were firing at UPC fighters outside the site, others believed the armed confrontation was with anti-balaka fighters – but the result was that one civilian reportedly was killed and another was badly injured. Both were hit by bullets that the injured man claims were fired by a Mauritanian soldier riding in an armoured vehicle. The injured man, who claims that he was unarmed, said he was standing with a group of family member mourning the body of his sister. (She had died after surgery for a miscarriage caused by the trauma of the 15 November attack.) He said that the Mauritanian soldier “shot wildly” toward the group and he was hit.

³¹ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 27 November 2018.

“My wife dragged me to the Gabonese troops,” he told Amnesty International.³² “She pulled me by my armpits and brought me to the base in the centre of the camp.”³³ From there he was brought to the hospital, together with a woman who had also been injured by gunfire. He later learned that the woman died of her injuries, a fact that was confirmed by several other residents of the site.

ATTACK IN IPPY

A situation like that in Alindao exists in Ippy, a town a couple of hundred kilometers north, still in the UPC’s zone of control. As in Alindao, much of the Christian population of the town has fled their homes and taken refuge around the Catholic Church. On 4 December, less than three weeks after the Alindao attack, a group of UPC fighters attacked the Catholic Church displaced persons site in Ippy. Apparently believing that anti-balaka fighters are being harbored among the displaced people, they wanted the site closed and its inhabitants returned to their homes.

Amnesty International received reports that two children were killed in the attack, one trampled in the crowd’s panic, and one hit by a stray bullet. A resident of the site reported that the child who was struck by the bullet was five years old, and was struck in her neck.³⁴ “She was brought to the hospital with her parents by the MINUSCA in their vehicle,” he said.

The man also said that during the attack, “the MINUSCA stayed in front of the church. They stayed watching only. They didn’t do anything. [It’s] the Mauritanian contingent.”

The following day, the site was reportedly burned to the ground in a second attack.

³² A contingent of Gabonese troops was temporarily dispatched to the displaced persons site in late November; they stayed for a short time and have since departed.

³³ Amnesty International interview, Bambari, 27 November 2018.

³⁴ Amnesty International telephone interview, 4 December 2018.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation in Alindao is far from settled, and the potential for renewed violence remains ever present. The UPC reportedly issued an edict after the 15 November attack calling for the displaced persons site at the Catholic Church to be closed and for its inhabitants to return to their homes.³⁵ While humanitarian groups managed to negotiate an extension and then a stay of the edict, the future of the site is still uncertain. Without sustained protection, as well as increased security to limit the presence of anti-balaka and other armed elements at the site, another attack could occur.

Continued unchecked violence would be a tragedy, not just for the Central African Republic, but also for the United Nations. As a 2009 study commissioned by the UN noted, the protection of civilians by peacekeeping missions is “central to the legitimacy and credibility of the entire United Nations system.”³⁶ The UN “can neither avoid its duty to protect civilians, nor afford to be discredited by failing to live up to its own ambitions.”

Amnesty International remains supportive of MINUSCA’s presence in the Central African Republic and recognises that, despite the challenges, the peacekeeping force has saved many lives. Peacekeepers have paid a high price for their efforts, with many having been killed, and many more seriously injured.³⁷

But for the mission to be a success it is crucial that MINUSCA learn from its experiences. It now has an important opportunity to do so.

Amnesty International offers the following key recommendations:

- UN Secretary-General António Guterres should set up an independent special investigation to look into the 15 November attack in Alindao, as well as into other recent incidents (such as in Batangafo) in which MINUSCA forces have been criticized for failing to respond adequately to attacks on civilians. The resulting report should be made public, and its recommendations should be accorded serious consideration.
- The independent special investigation should also document the war crimes committed by those who attacked the camp, preserving evidence and testimony for use by the International Criminal Court and the Special Criminal Court.

³⁵ One source attributed this edict – which people described as an “ultimatum” – to the Islamic Community of Alindao.

³⁶ Victoria K. Holt and Glyn Taylor, *Protecting Civilians in the Context of UN Peacekeeping Operations: Successes, Setbacks and Remaining Challenges*, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, November 2009, p. 4.

³⁷ The Central African Republic is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for UN peacekeepers, with at least 20 peacekeepers having been killed there since January 2017. See, for example, Simon Allison, “The world’s most dangerous peacekeeping mission?” Institute for Security Studies, 20 November 2017.

- MINUSCA should conduct frequent risk assessments of potential trouble spots across the country, with military operations personnel consulting with representatives of the civilian protection cluster, to ensure that adequate military forces are present to protect civilians in locations where they are most at risk.
- MINUSCA should ensure that adequate military forces with appropriate equipment carry out robust patrols in high-risk areas of the country, including Bambari, Batangafo, Alindao, Ippy, and Bangassou.
- The UN Security Council, its member states, and DPKO should ensure that adequate human, financial, and logistical resources are provided MINUSCA, to allow it to fulfil a demanding multidimensional mandate that includes ensuring accountability for crimes under international law, protection of civilians, reform of the security services, and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of fighters.
- The UN should conduct periodic assessments to make sure that troop and police-contributing countries respect UN standards and, in particular, that they provide adequate pre-deployment training, including on issues such as human rights and sexual exploitation and abuse, and that members of their contingents are given adequate salaries and decent living conditions.

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“EVERYTHING WAS IN FLAMES”

THE ATTACK ON A DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP IN ALINDAO

A brutal attack on a displaced persons camp in the town of Alindao, in the Basse-Kotto region of the Central African Republic, took place on 15 November 2018. The Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique, UPC), a Seleka off-shoot, together with large numbers of armed Muslim civilians, fired mortars and rocket-propelled grenades at the camp and then overran it, killing between 70 and 100 camp residents.

The dead included many women, children, older people, and people with disabilities, as well as two Catholic priests. Many people burned alive in their shelters.

Based primarily on interviews with survivors, this briefing describes the events that led up to the attack, how the attack was carried out, and how the UN peacekeepers stationed at the camp failed to respond to it. Rather than defend against the attackers, or even fire warning shots, the peacekeepers retreated to their main base at the site.

Amnesty International is calling on the United Nations to establish an independent special investigation to look into the 15 November attack and make recommendations as to how to prevent such deadly and destructive incidents in the future.