



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took office. This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



U.S. Department of State

Central African Republic Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

The Central African Republic became a democracy in 1993 following free and fair elections in which Ange Felix Patasse, candidate of the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People, was chosen President. Citizens also elected an 85-member National Assembly; no party holds a majority. In 1994 a Constitution providing for multiparty democracy was accepted in a national referendum. The judiciary is subject to executive interference.

In January following the killing of two French military officers by rebel troops, French troops seized key installations in and around the cities of Lakouanga and Bimbo, effectively ending the latest in a series of 1996 rebellions by forces opposed to the Patasse Government. A January 25 accord formally ended the November 1996 mutiny. President Patasse appointed Michel Gbezera-Bria as Prime Minister and established the Government for the Defense of Democracy. It included both the ruling party and members of the opposition political coalition. The African Mediation Coalition sent an Inter-African peacekeeping force, MISAB, to the capital, Bangui, in late January. MISAB established a procedure for reintegration of ebels at Camp Kasai and collection of weapons distributed by rebels to civilians. In June rebel factions attacked MISAB troops, renewing the violence in the Bangui area. In fighting during late June, 500 persons were killed and 70,000 civilians were forced to flee the area. In July talks mediated by Amadou Toumani Toure, a former president of Mali, resulted in an agreement between the Government and the mutineers that ended the June mutiny.

Military forces, the National Gendarmerie under the Minister of Defense, the National Research and Investigation Force (CNRI), the civilian police force, share internal security responsibilities under the

direction of the Minister of Public Security. After the 1996 mutinies, the Presidential security guard increased in size and responsibility. MISAB helps maintain order in the capital. Security forces committed serious human rights abuses. Some members of MISAB also committed serious abuses.

The Central African Republic is a landlocked and sparsely populated country, most of whose inhabitants practice subsistence agriculture. Annual per capita gross domestic product is estimated at \$357. Principal exports are coffee, cotton, timber, tobacco, and diamonds. The military and civil unrests during the year resulted in further significant decreases in public revenues and higher unemployment.

The Government's human rights record remained poor, and serious human rights abuses continued in certain areas. There were credible reports of routine summary executions of suspected bandits by security forces, and of the death of prisoners due to security force abuse. Police torture and beatings of detainees and prisoners continued. The President in March granted amnesty to the rebel forces for acts that they had committed during the November 1996 mutiny. The Government did not prosecute members of the armed forces who were accused of abuses during any of the 1996 mutinies. It granted amnesty to participants in the November 1996 mutiny. Other human rights abuses included harsh prison conditions, arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention without trial, limits on judicial independence, infringements on citizens' right to privacy, restrictions on freedom of assembly, some limits on freedom of religion, restraints on press freedom to criticize the Government, a pattern of discrimination and violence against women, female genital mutilation, and discrimination against Pygmies.

In March President Patasse granted amnesty to former senior officials of the Kolingba regime who were charged with corruption. These people had been held in detention for an extended period.

According to credible sources, members of the Chadian contingent of the MISAB reportedly committed human rights abuses, including the killing of civilians and the looting of residences.

Many human rights abuses were reported in the areas controlled by the rebels. Rebel forces were responsible for killings, disappearances, robberies, carjackings, rape, arson, and other abuses committed against civilians.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing

There were no known political killings (former Interior Minister Grelombe was killed by unknown persons during the November mutiny). There were credible reports that the army and the gendarmerie routinely executed suspected bandits and other persons.

In May three former rebels, arrested for the alleged killing of a presidential guard and his wife were killed while in the custody of the gendarmerie. Opposition parties accused the Presidential Guard and some military personnel of this killing which took place in gendarmerie headquarters; the Government conducted a judicial investigation, but results have not been released. The Government did not prosecute members of the security forces for these or other killings. Approximately 10 prisoners died in custody at the police antibanditry station in Bangui in connection with repression of banditry, according to the Central African Republic Human Rights League (see Section 1.c.).

Gendarmes and military loyalists dispersed a December 1996 demonstration, killing and injuring many

protesters (see Section 2.a.).

Soldiers reportedly killed an estimated 200 persons during the four mutinies. President Patasse granted amnesty to all soldiers who had mutinied in April, May, and November. The Government neither investigated nor prosecuted members of the armed forces for the killings and other reported abuses committed during the 1996 military mutinies.

Rebel forces killed numerous persons, often targeting, torturing, and killing civilians (see Section 1.g.).

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Although the Penal Code prohibits torture and specifies sanctions for those found guilty of physical abuse, the police continue to beat and otherwise abuse criminal suspects and prisoners. At one police station, police reportedly tortured and abused all the individuals detained. Members of the security forces also tortured and beat journalists (see Section 2.a.). Many deaths of prisoners due to official abuse were reported to the courts by family members and by the Human Rights League executive committee, with no evident official response taken. In May, three former rebels died in the custody of the gendarmerie (see Section 1.a.). The August-September 1996 National Conference on Defense (Etats-Generaux) recommended the abolition of special secret police units due to abusive treatment of detainees and their operation as a parallel and secret army outside the normal enforcement structure. There was no further government action on this recommendation.

Rebel forces used torture and rape, particularly against civilians (see Section 1.g.).

Prison conditions are extremely harsh. Cells are overcrowded, and the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, and medical care, are in short supply. Available supplies are reportedly routinely diverted to prison officials for their personal use. Prisoners are frequently forced to perform uncompensated labor at the residences of government officials. Male and female prisoners are confined in separate facilities in Bangui but housed together elsewhere. Minors are routinely housed with adults and subjected to physical abuse. The infamous Ngaragba prison is still in use despite promises in 1996 to construct a new facility.

The Government permits prison visits by human rights monitors.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law provides for protection against arbitrary arrest and detention, but security forces often ignore these provisions.

The law stipulates that persons detained in cases other than those involving national security must be brought before a magistrate within 96 hours. In practice, the authorities often do not respect this deadline, in part due to inefficient judicial procedures. Judicial warrants are not required for arrest. By law, national security detainees, defined as "those held for crimes against the security of the State," may be held without charge for up to 2 months. Previous governments used the national security provision of the law to arrest their opponents. The Patasse Government has not detained political opponents under this provision, although presidential guards arbitrarily arrested people suspected of support of the

mutineers; they were released within days. Presidential guards also arrested the editor of an independent newspaper (see Section 2.a.).

Prolonged pretrial detention is a problem. Roughly one-half the male prison population are pretrial detainees. Officials of the Kolingba regime (1981-1993), who had been officially charged with corruption and in some cases detained more than 18 months without trial, were released during the November 1996 mutiny. In late March, as required by the Bangui Accords, President Patasse granted amnesty to those officials and all rebels. According to the Government prosecutor, about 100 civilians arrested by the gendarmes and security guards and accused of participating in the rebellion were also released under the pressure of the International Follow-up Committee.

The law does not permit the use of exile, and the Government has not employed it in practice. The Government has repeatedly stated that any person in exile for strictly political, rather than criminal, reasons may return without fear of persecution. At the end of the year, there were no known political self-exiles.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but there are reliable reports of periodic executive interference.

The judiciary, which consists of regular and military courts, was reorganized in the 1994 Constitution. Legislation implementing this reorganization was enacted in 1996. New courts of justice were created during the year in both urban and rural areas.

In criminal cases, the accused are presumed innocent and have the right