

an uncertain future?

Children and Armed Conflict in the Central African Republic

iDMC internal
displacement
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centre

WATCH LIST ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

May 2011

About Watchlist

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist) strives to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, the Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national, and international non-governmental organizations, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts in order to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

For further information about Watchlist or specific reports, please contact: watchlist@watchlist.org / www.watchlist.org

About IDMC

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide. IDMC's main activities include monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalized violence, and violations of human rights; training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs; and contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For further information, please visit www.internal-displacement.org

Acknowledgements

This report was researched and written by Laura Perez for Watchlist and IDMC. Watchlist and IDMC are very grateful to Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) for making this study possible by facilitating interviews and group discussions with children affected by armed conflict, and by providing assistance, accommodation, transportation, and security in their respective field offices. Watchlist and IDMC are also grateful to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for their help with travel arrangements and logistics.

Special thanks are due to Marzia Vigliaroni and Moumini Maibe of COOPI, Alberta Santini, Patrice Effebi and Gervais Ngovon of DRC, and Brooke Lauten, Herve Gauthier Ndanous, Herve Fulbert Balehozo, and Thibault Ephrem Doguela of IRC.

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Map of the Central African Republic



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List of Acronyms

APRD	Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy
BINUCA	United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic
CAR	Central African Republic
COOPI	Cooperazione Internazionale (International Cooperation)
CPJP	Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECHO	European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office
EU	European Union
FACA	Central African Armed Forces
FOMUC	Multinational Force in the Central African Republic
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MICOPAX	Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in the Central African Republic
MINURCAT	United Nations Mission in CAR and Chad
MRM	Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism
MONUC	UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
PBC	United Nations Peacebuilding Commission
PBF	United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
UFDR	Union of Democratic Forces for Unity
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Force
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Program

executive summary and recommendations



In order to advise policy-makers at a critical juncture after the re-election in January 2011 of President François Bozizé of the Central African Republic (CAR), the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) joined forces to conduct a four-week field mission to CAR to research and report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. We found evidence that at least four of the six grave violations monitored under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) are still being committed against children in CAR: the abduction of children, recruitment or use of child soldiers, attacks against schools, and the denial of humanitarian access to children.

CAR is situated at the heart of one of the most volatile regions in the world, where it shares borders with Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Sudan. CAR also has some of the worst humanitarian indicators in the world and has been ranked the world's fourth most under-funded and ignored humanitarian crisis. In addition, the people of CAR suffer a weak government, with minimal support from the international community, which cannot protect them from violence or meet their urgent needs for nutrition, water and sanitation, health care, and education.

Children in CAR face severe human rights abuses and violations. Numerous armed groups are active throughout the country, terrorizing communities and abducting children. Three groups in particular are guilty of egregious crimes against children and are still committing four of the six grave violations against CAR's children.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which for years has terrorized communities and abducted children in northern Uganda, more recently has been forced into remote areas of nearby countries, including CAR, where it has attacked villages and abducted children. The Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) is the only armed group still fighting the government, and is reportedly recruiting or using child soldiers and attacking schools in the northeast. Self-defense militias, created by communities to protect themselves from attack, recruit children as young as 12 years old and use them to fight.

To make matters worse, systems for monitoring violations and protecting and assisting children in CAR are virtually non-existent. For example, the UN's Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), established under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 to address the six grave violations committed against children, has been practically dormant since its establishment in CAR in 2008. The MRM in CAR has received only minimal operational support from the international community. Inadequate funding and a lack of awareness and knowledge of the MRM by UN agencies has further aggravated the situation. In addition, few protection-mandated non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in CAR focus on children's issues, or offer specialized assistance such as psychosocial care. As a result, violations perpetrated against children in CAR are under-reported.

There are other UN mechanisms in CAR that can help protect children forced into armed groups. The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) supports countries emerging from conflict, such as CAR, whose governments have asked for assistance from the international community. In CAR, the PBC is working in numerous areas, such as security sector reform which includes the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers. It has been effective in mobilizing funds for CAR, however it has not prioritized reintegration programs in its allocation of funding.

The Protection Cluster in CAR, part of the UN's cluster approach to strengthen partnerships and ensure more predictability and accountability, has recently reactivated the child protection sub-cluster led by UNICEF and UNHCR, and created the gender-based violence (GBV) sub-cluster led by UNICEF and UNFPA. Its success in protecting children affected by armed conflict will lie in its ability to establish complementary systems for collecting data among the relevant sub-clusters, and its ability to share this information with the MRM.

The signing of an action plan, an agreement between an armed group and the UN that marks a commitment to end the recruitment or use of child soldiers and outlines concrete, time-bound steps for their release, would be an important step towards improving the protection of children in armed conflict in CAR. None of the armed groups in CAR have signed an action plan, however.

1. Findings:

Abduction of children: The Lord's Resistance Army

While in the captivity of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), boys abducted from Obo in the southeast of CAR are trained to use weapons with which they have been forced to commit atrocities such as looting and burning villages, killing village residents, and abducting other children. Girls from CAR are forced to do domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and fetching water, and are given to LRA commanders as sex slaves. Children who manage to escape experience great difficulties in getting home—a journey that in some cases lasts almost as long as their time in captivity, which can be upwards of ten months. They rarely receive much-needed psychosocial care or adequate assistance to heal from these traumatic experiences.

Recruitment or use of child soldiers: Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace

While reports indicate that the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) is still recruiting children, the lack of humanitarian access to areas in the northeast near Ndélé under CPJP control has made it impossible for the humanitarian community to gather information on the number of children that may have been recruited by CPJP, how many among them are girls, how many have been victims of sexual violence, and whether CPJP is willing to release children from its ranks.

Self-defense militias

Communities in Bocaranga and Obo in the northwest and southeast of the country, have formed self-defense militias. Children recruited by these militias may find themselves on the front lines of combat when, as part of their role with the militias, they conduct night patrols with their parents. By having to work at night to defend their communities and

thereby unable to attend school during the day, these children are missing important developmental stages and their long-term well-being is being jeopardized.

Sustainable reintegration programs: Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy

While disarmament and demobilization programs in the northwestern towns of Paoua and Bocaranga have facilitated the release of 525 children from the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD) – the largest armed group in CAR – sustainable reintegration programs are lacking and should be further developed to prevent released children from returning to violence and to enable them to contribute to the future economic development of the region.

Attacks against schools

In CAR, armed groups have looted, burned, and destroyed schools when attacking villages, and have occupied schools for military purposes, further destroying an already fragile education system. Teachers in CAR have been threatened or attacked and schools have been closed as a result of insecurity and a lack of teachers.

Denial of humanitarian access to children

There is little humanitarian assistance available in CAR, particularly in the conflict zones, where children need it most. The CPJP, which is the only armed group that has yet to sign a cease-fire agreement or adhere to the 2008 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, has made it impossible to access some areas near Ndélé in the northeast of the country. The government of CAR has imposed military restrictions to counter insecurity which have further impeded humanitarian access in CPJP-controlled areas. LRA activity restricts access in the southeast of the country, where the UN requires its agencies to use armed escorts. These measures have left children with urgent protection and assistance needs that have yet to be met.

Looking forward to an uncertain future

The re-election of President Bozizé has the potential to help CAR transition into a post-conflict situation and gradually foster socio-economic development if he and his government are able to consolidate the peace process and mark a real end to the armed conflict in CAR. Most importantly, this post-election phase offers a unique opportunity for the children of CAR who have lost almost everything to conflict to reclaim their future. However, the international community must respond *now* and commit the necessary financial and human resources to help children affected by armed conflict in CAR. These resources are needed to improve the monitoring and reporting of violations committed against children, and to offer the necessary protection and assistance in response.

2. Recommendations:

As a result of these findings, Watchlist and IDMC propose the following recommendations:

Government of CAR

- Strengthen the capacity of the government's Central African Armed Forces (FACA) by increasing troop numbers, and by equipping and deploying troops trained in human rights to areas of displacement where communities have had to create self-defense militias because of the absence or limited capacity of state security forces.

- End government support of community self-defense militias that carry out security functions legally assigned to the army. Ensure that these militias release the children they have recruited, and sign and implement action plans with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- Negotiate a cease-fire agreement with the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Ensure that the armed groups that are now aligned with the government as part of the 2008 Comprehensive Peace Agreement do not use school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)

- Negotiate a cease-fire agreement with the government that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Release all children under the age of 18 currently serving in CPJP ranks, and end further recruitment and use of children in accordance with international obligations.
- Immediately negotiate, sign, and implement an action plan with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers and other violations against children.
- Cease all attacks against schools, students, teachers, and other educational personnel.

Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD)

- Cease the use of school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.
- Immediately negotiate, sign, and implement an action plan with the UN to prevent further recruitment and use of child soldiers.

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- Reinforce the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA)'s child protection component with the necessary financial and human resources to carry out MRM field missions and conduct MRM technical trainings that will strengthen the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.
- In view of repeated and persistent violations against children by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in breach of international norms and standards, impose targeted measures against the LRA in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1539, 1612, and 1882.
- Encourage the government to negotiate a cease-fire agreement with CPJP that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Encourage the government to end its support of community self-defense militias that carry out security functions legally assigned to the army. Ensure that these militias release the children they have recruited, and sign and implement action plans with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- Urge all armed forces and groups to cease the use of school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

UN Secretary-General

- Given the release of children from APRD ranks, and APRD's attempts to conclude an action plan with the UN, request that the UN Country Team renew efforts to develop and implement an action plan with APRD to prevent further recruitment and use of children, with a view to de-listing APRD from the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict.
- Urge the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Central African Republic to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of the MRM in CAR by requesting that UN agencies that are members of the MRM Task Force commit significant time and human resources to the MRM technical group, including by attaching staff that have decision-making authority and are in CAR on long-term contracts.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Conduct negotiations with CPJP to secure unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Strongly advocate for an increased UN presence in Ndélé by deploying UNICEF and UNHCR staff to monitor and report on the recruitment of children by CPJP, and to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict, and of displaced communities in the area.
- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UN presence in Obo, particularly of UNICEF, to monitor and report on the abduction of children by the LRA, and to improve the protection and assistance of children who have returned from captivity.
- Work with UN Country Teams and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the region to develop efficient regional logistics for reception and family tracing for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, particularly to shorten the route, distance, and length of time it takes to get Central African children home.
- Work with the MRM Task Force in CAR to develop and implement: (1) action plans to prevent further recruitment and use of children by armed groups who have already released all children from their ranks, such as APRD; (2) action plans to release children from armed groups that have yet to release children, such as CPJP and self-defense militias.

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Support the UN Country Team in negotiating: (1) action plans to prevent further recruitment and use of children by armed groups that have already released all children from their ranks, such as APRD; (2) action plans to release children from armed groups that have yet to release children, such as CPJP and self-defense militias.
- Secure the participation of national and international NGOs in the MRM Task Force by addressing their concerns regarding confidentiality and the safety of sharing sensitive information, and by providing them with technical trainings that will build their capacity to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.
- Decentralize the process of verifying information collected through the MRM by making field-based UN agencies responsible for verifying information coming out of their respective geographical areas of operation.

- Establish a secure information-sharing system with the protection and education clusters, and the gender-based violence and child protection sub-clusters, both in the capital, Bangui, and at the field level, to ensure that any information related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 that is being collected or shared with the clusters is also shared with the MRM Task Force.
- Develop technical trainings designed specifically for NGOs working on education to build their capacity to monitor and report on attacks against schools in CAR.
- Work with UNICEF to develop trainings on the MRM and the six grave violations committed against children for armed forces and groups to inform them about the mechanism and to alert them to the fact that UN agencies and NGOs will be monitoring and reporting on issues related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882.

UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA)

- Ensure that BINUCA's child protection component has the necessary financial and human resources to carry out MRM field missions and conduct MRM technical trainings that will strengthen the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.

UNICEF

- Commit the necessary financial and human resources, including key staff on long-term contracts, to adequately co-lead the MRM Task Force in CAR.
- Work with the protection cluster to ensure that the action plans of the newly reactivated child protection sub-cluster are fully funded and implemented, that the child protection sub-cluster can access the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for funding for the MRM, and that child protection concerns are mainstreamed into all clusters activated in CAR.
- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UNICEF presence in Ndélé to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict.
- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UNICEF presence in Obo to improve the protection of children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity.

Protection Cluster in CAR

- Hold talks with the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), which is fighting the LRA in southeast CAR and recruiting ex-LRA combatants for their forces, to address the re-traumatization of victims of the LRA in Obo, where UPDF has a military base. Children who were abducted by the LRA and who managed to escape are being forced to interact on a daily basis in Obo with ex-LRA combatants. Talks should consider quick impact solutions such as preventing ex-LRA combatants from leaving the UPDF base in Obo except as part of tracking teams sent into the forest to pursue the LRA, and ensuring that they have minimal contact with the local population. Talks should also consider longer-term issues of impunity and accountability on an individual basis.

UN Peacebuilding Commission

- In light of the Commission's efforts to rebuild communities affected by conflict and to prevent a return to violence, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund sustainable reintegration programs for children demobilized from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga, as well as urgently needed psychosocial programs for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity in southeast CAR, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.
- In light of the Commission's promotion of good governance, rule of law, and security sector reform, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund the implementation of the MRM in CAR to ensure that the capacity of NGOs to monitor and report on children's rights violations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 is adequately strengthened.

US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

- Pursuant to the declaration of disaster made by the U.S. Embassy in the capital Bangui on January 27, 2011 regarding displacement caused by the LRA, release USAID/OFDA funds for urgently needed psychosocial programs to benefit children in southeast CAR abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence. Funds should also be released for agriculture, food security, and health services to benefit internally displaced persons (IDPs) in LRA-affected areas of southeast CAR.

European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)

- Assess humanitarian needs in LRA-affected areas of southeast CAR and reevaluate existing programs accordingly to strengthen the humanitarian response to children affected by armed conflict.
- Fund urgently needed psychosocial programs in southeast CAR for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.
- Assess humanitarian needs in districts near Paoua and Bocaranga in the interest of funding much-needed reintegration programs for demobilized children and assistance to the displaced communities from which they come.

Donor Countries

- Ensure flexible and sustainable funding for (1) the MRM process in CAR to ensure that the capacity of NGOs to monitor and report on children's rights violations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 is adequately strengthened; (2) sustainable reintegration programs for children demobilized from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga; (3) prevention programs for children at risk of recruitment in Ndélé; and (4) psychosocial programs in southeast CAR for children abducted by the LRA and no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.

Methodology

In January 2011, the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict (Watchlist) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) joined forces to conduct a four-week field mission to the Central African Republic (CAR) to research and report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The mission took place from January 8 to February 6, 2011 and research was conducted in the capital, Bangui, and in the towns of Bocaranga, Paoua, Ndélé, and Obo (see map below). These four towns were chosen in consultation with partner NGOs working in CAR because all have been affected by conflict-related violence, all host displaced communities, and in all of them armed groups have committed one or more of the six grave violations against children monitored by UN Security Council Resolution 1612.

Watchlist and IDMC also conducted research in villages near Bocaranga and Paoua, and in three IDP camps in Obo. These were:

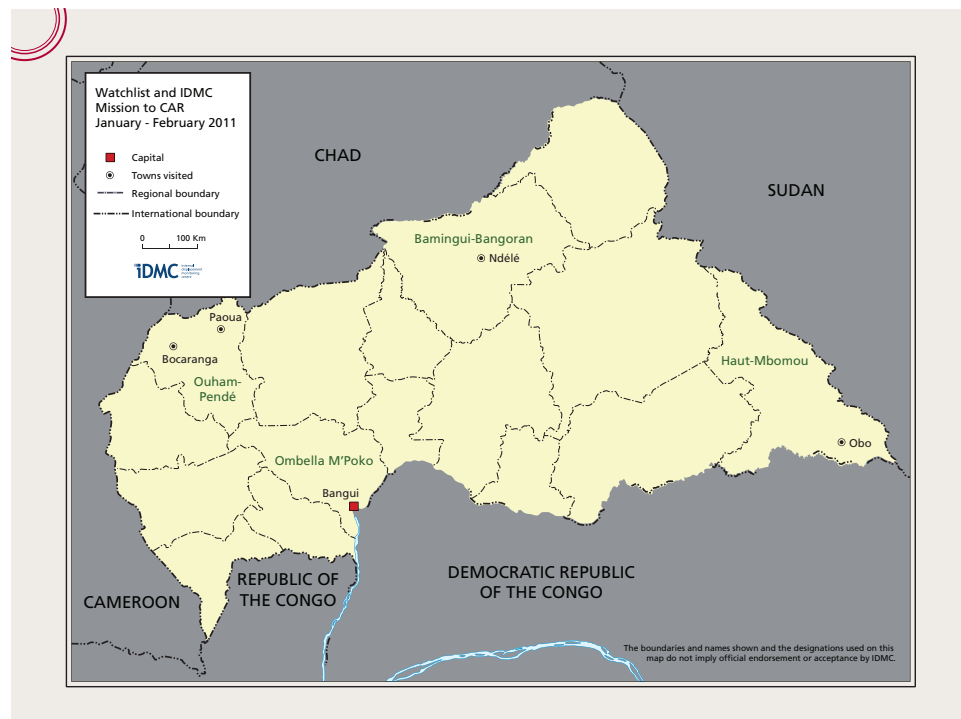
Name of village	Distance from Bocaranga
Bezere	22 km (13.6 miles)
Bilseme	10 km (6.2 miles)
Doko	25 km (15.5 miles)
Koun Bam II	60 km (37.2 miles)
Loura	45 km (27.9 miles)
Name of village	Distance from Paoua
Betoko	45 km (27.9 miles), on the road to Bemal, near the Chad border
Korozian	40 km (24.8 miles), on the road to Bossangoa
Name of IDP camps located on the outskirts of Obo	
Gougberé, Koubou, and Kourouko	

During the mission, Watchlist and IDMC held individual interviews or group discussions with demobilized children formerly associated with the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD), children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who were no longer in captivity, internally displaced children and their families, internally displaced community leaders and teachers, local authorities (including *sous-préfets*, mayors, and education and social services officials), religious leaders, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, human rights defenders, defense and security forces (including the army and the *gendarmérie*, regional peacekeeping forces, and Ugandan military forces), and self-defense militias. Watchlist and IDMC were unable to interview spokespersons for insurgent armed groups either because they were unavailable due to the electoral campaign held in January 2011 or because of security restrictions.



Several topics which merit comprehensive attention were not addressed in this report, either because they fall outside the specific focus of the situation of children affected by armed conflict or because of the difficulties involved in getting substantive information within a limited time frame. These include protection risks faced by children accused of witchcraft, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) committed against children in the context of armed conflict. While there is ample evidence and documentation of SGBV occurring in CAR, the link to armed conflict and to rape being used as a weapon of war has been more difficult to establish. Jean-Pierre Bemba, the former vice-president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), is currently on trial before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague and charged with command responsibility for crimes against humanity and war crimes, including rape, committed by his militia who were sent to CAR from October 2002 to March 2003 to support the former Central African President Ange-Félix Patassé. However, Bemba's trial is not related to the most recent armed conflict that broke out in CAR in 2005, which is the one being covered in this report.

Field research for this report was accompanied by an extensive literature review of publicly available documents and unpublished studies on the human rights situation in CAR and the broader socio-political context. All interviews with children were conducted in accordance with confidentiality and ethical standards. The names of children quoted in this report have been changed to protect their privacy and ensure their safety. Staff from Cooperazione Internazionale, Danish Refugee Council, and International Rescue Committee worked as translators during interviews and group discussions whenever needed.



Background

A landlocked country of 4.5 million people, the Central African Republic (CAR) shares borders with Chad, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in a region characterized by inter-related armed conflicts, high levels of insecurity despite the presence of international peacekeeping troops, the widespread availability of small arms, and forced displacement within and across borders. In 2010, all four countries were included in the list of the world's top ten failed states.¹

Armed conflict broke out in 2005 between the government of President François Bozizé and several armed groups seeking political representation and a share of power.²

The fighting lasted until mid-2008, causing the displacement of 300,000 people, either across the border into neighboring Cameroon and Chad, or within CAR where those who fled sought refuge among impoverished host communities or in the forest, without access to basic services.

Displacement was also caused by criminal gangs known as *Zaraguina* or *coupeurs de route* who take advantage of the inability of government forces to provide security. In 2008, the UN estimated that one-third of all people displaced in CAR had been displaced by criminal gangs.³ The state's inability to control its territory has also made CAR a base for foreign armed groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Originally from Uganda, the LRA has crossed borders into CAR, DRC, and South Sudan, displacing more than 20,000 people in southeast CAR alone since 2008.⁴

Comprehensive Peace Agreement

Following individual cease-fire agreements with two of the armed groups—the Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD) and the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR)—the government of CAR and all the country's armed groups signed the Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2008. The Agreement required the government to pass a general amnesty law and to undertake the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants. These efforts paved the way for further talks in CAR's capital Bangui in December 2008, known as the "Inclusive Political Dialogue." However, the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), a splinter armed group, is still active in the northeast of the country where humanitarian access remains limited. Former president Ange-Felix Patassé, overthrown by Bozizé in 2003, returned from exile to participate in the peace talks and ran as an independent candidate in the presidential election held in January 2011. President Bozizé was elected to a second term in office with 64 percent of the vote.

Presence of international troops

International peacekeeping troops have had little impact in CAR. They have been deployed in small numbers to limited operational areas. The Multinational Force of the Central African Republic (FOMUC), a regional peacekeeping force of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) funded by the European Union and France, was deployed in CAR until 2008 with a mandate to provide security by patrolling the country's main roads.



However, it was only allocated 200 troops, its area of operations was limited to three towns in the north (Bossangoa, Bozoum, and Paoua), and it was not authorized to patrol more than ten kilometers (6.2 miles) from the center of each town. In July 2008, FOMUC was replaced by the Mission for the Consolidation of Peace in Central African Republic (MICOPAX), and while troop numbers were increased to 700, the force's operational area was not expanded.⁵

In 2007, UN Security Council Resolution 1778 authorized the creation of the UN Mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), a joint UN mission to both CAR and Chad, in response to the growing levels of insecurity and human rights abuses in both countries. It also approved the deployment of a European Union Force mission (EUFOR) to protect refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) affected by the spillover of violence from Darfur, and to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In CAR, the force's impact was limited because fewer than 300 troops were deployed to the northeast, near the border with Sudan, while most of the IDPs were located in the northwest of the country. EUFOR was replaced by MINURCAT troops in March 2009. In early 2010, President Idriss Déby of Chad called for the withdrawal of MINURCAT, alleging that the force had been slow to deploy and had failed to protect civilians or build promised infrastructure projects.⁶ MINURCAT troops were withdrawn from both countries by the end of 2010 in accordance with the end of their mandate as provided by UN Security Council Resolution 1923.

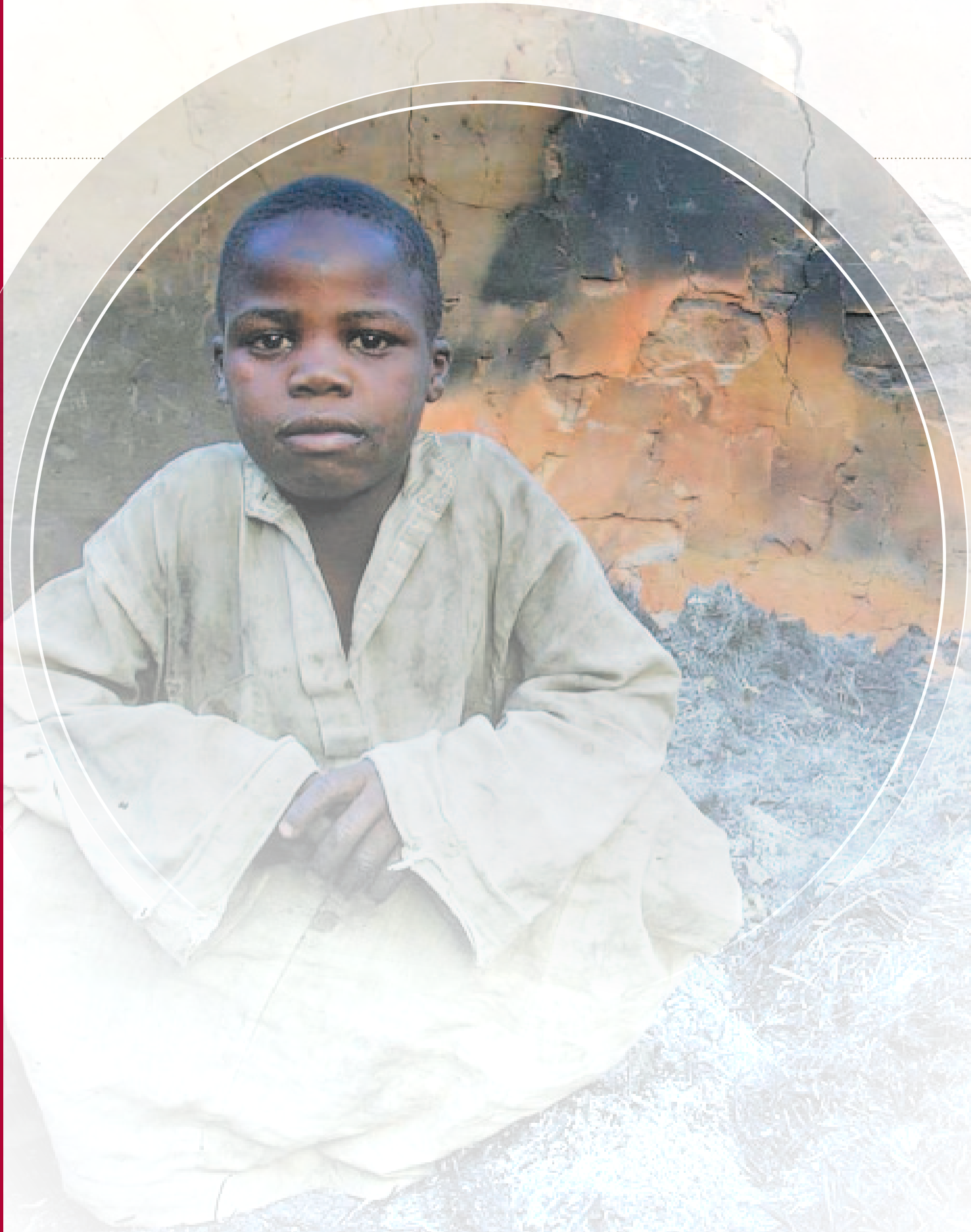
Humanitarian impact

The humanitarian crisis in CAR was ranked the world's fourth most under-funded and ignored in 2010.⁷ Internal armed conflict and the spillover of fighting from neighboring countries have left CAR with some of the worst humanitarian indicators in the world. It is ranked 159th out of 169 countries on the UN's 2010 Human Development Index,⁸ and six percent of its population dies every year – a rate four times higher than in any other African country.⁹ In addition, 60 percent of the population does not have access to potable water or basic sanitation, and 62 percent live on less than \$1.25 a day.¹⁰ Communities affected by armed conflict face ongoing insecurity and urgent needs in nutrition, water and sanitation, health, and education.

Children and armed conflict in CAR

All children in CAR are affected by the chronic lack of social services, including education, health care, and water and sanitation after years of very low levels of government spending in these areas.¹¹ Central African children who live in conflict-affected areas also face specific protection needs due to ongoing insecurity and violence. Many have suffered trauma after witnessing extreme levels of violence such as the killing of family members, rape and other sexual violence, and the looting and burning of their homes. During these attacks, some children, including girls, have been abducted to work as porters of stolen property or kidnapped for ransom; many others have been recruited into armed groups. Central African children living in conflict-affected areas have also suffered from forced internal displacement, and are thought to account for more than 50 percent of all IDPs.¹²

This report examines the impact of armed conflict on children in the towns of Obo, Ndélé, Paoua, and Bocaranga, by analyzing four of the six grave violations committed against children and monitored under UN Security Council Resolution 1612. These include the abduction of children, recruitment or use of child soldiers, attacks against schools, and the denial of humanitarian access to children.



part I: the impact of armed conflict on children

abduction of children

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abduction: is the unlawful removal, seizure, capture, apprehension, taking or enforced disappearance of a child either temporarily or permanently for the purpose of any form of exploitation of the child – this includes but is not limited to recruitment in armed forces or groups, participation in hostilities, sexual exploitation or abuse, forced labor, hostage-taking, or indoctrination. If a child is recruited by force by an armed force or group, this is considered as two separate violations – being abduction and recruitment.

MRM Field Manual: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, UNICEF, April 2010.

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) took up arms against the government of Uganda in the 1980s under the leadership of Joseph Kony. In recent years, the Ugandan army has forced the LRA into remote areas of nearby countries, including CAR, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and South Sudan. The top commanders of the LRA are sought by the International Criminal Court (ICC) under arrest warrants issued in July 2005 for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in northern Uganda.

The LRA has been active in CAR since February 2008, abducting more than 350 people and displacing over 25,000 in the southeast of the country.¹³ Towns affected by LRA violence are located along the border with DRC and include Bangassou, Rafai, Zémio, M'boki, Djemah, and Obo. In October 2010, the LRA attacked the northeast town of Birao, abducting children, looting property, and setting fire to shops and homes. This attack was significant as it showed the LRA pushing north, toward the border with Chad, where it may be more difficult to pursue.¹⁴ As of this writing, the latest LRA attack in CAR occurred in March 2011,

in the central mining town of Nzako. At least six people were killed, including four soldiers, and between 30 and 50 people were abducted.¹⁵ Given the history of LRA attacks in CAR, the abduction of children is likely to continue while the LRA remains active there.

Watchlist and IDMC visited the town of Obo, near the border with DRC, where the LRA launched a major attack in March 2008, during which over 100 people were abducted; half are thought to have been children.¹⁶ The LRA Victims Association in Obo believes that more than 30 children abducted from Obo in March 2008 are still with the LRA.¹⁷ The attack occurred late at night while many residents were attending a wake for an elderly woman who had died. The *tongo-tongo*, as the LRA is known locally, went door to door, systematically breaking into homes, abducting adults and children, and looting their property. Abductees were lined up, tied together by the waist, and forced to carry belongings that had been stolen from their homes. After the first day of walking in the forest, the LRA released the weaker people in the group, including the old and the very young. After a few days they released the remaining adults, until finally they were left almost exclusively with children between the ages of 12 and 16.

The remaining children were forced to cross the border into DRC and walk for over one month in the thick, canopy forest that divides the two countries. They were taken to an LRA camp in Garamba National Park where they were used as child soldiers and sex slaves.¹⁸ Some

“The *tongo-tongo*, as the LRA is known locally, went door to door, systematically breaking into homes, abducting adults and children, and looting their property.”

have been able to escape from the LRA and have returned home to Obo, while others have either been killed or are still in captivity. At the LRA camp, abducted children were forbidden to speak their native tongue, Zande, and had to learn Acholi, the language of communications in the camp, which is spoken in northern Uganda. Children abducted from DRC and Sudan also were forbidden from speaking their own language.

Abducted children also were forced to work as farmers under grueling conditions. Boys were trained to use weapons with which they were forced to commit atrocities such as looting and burning villages, killing village residents, and abducting children. Girls were forced to do domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and fetching water, and many were given to LRA commanders as sex slaves. It is important to note that the LRA not only abducts children and recruits and uses them as child soldiers, it also commits rape and other forms of sexual violence.

While most girls were not given firearms, they were still expected to participate in the destruction of villages and the killing sprees. They use machetes and wood clubs for these tasks, hacking up or beating people to death. The boys and girls interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC also described liquids they were made to drink and religious rituals they had to perform before attacking villages. The liquids and rituals made them feel invincible, and altered their minds into believing that they were killing animals rather than fellow human beings. These children are still haunted by the violence they were forced to inflict. Peter, a 13-year-old boy interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC in Obo, said: “On some nights I’m afraid of going to sleep because when I close my eyes I see things that I don’t want to remember. I see someone doing bad things to people and I think it’s me.”

In the LRA camp, abducted girls were given as “wives” to military commanders and some bore the commanders children despite their young age. Marie, a girl interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC, was abducted from Obo when she was only 12 years old. Because she was a virgin, she was given to a top-ranking LRA commander and was forced to live as his “wife” for almost ten months. When the commander grew tired of Marie, he passed her on to other commanders. Of her experiences, she said: “I don’t remember how many other men I was forced

to serve, but they were all the same. I was not allowed to speak to them or ask them any questions. I would be beaten if I ever disobeyed an order. So I just kept quiet and did my chores.” ●

In October 2010, ministers from CAR, DRC, Sudan, and Uganda met in Bangui to set up a joint military task force to pursue the LRA across the region’s vast and porous borders under the supervision of the African Union.¹⁹ The U.S. Congress also passed into law the “Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act,” which requires the Obama administration to adopt a comprehensive strategy to help governments in the region disarm the LRA and protect civilians. The law calls for the coordination of U.S. diplomatic, economic, intelligence, and military efforts, as well as increased humanitarian aid to affected populations.²⁰

recommendations (LRA)

Government of CAR

- Strengthen the capacity of the government’s Central African Armed Forces (FACA) by increasing troop numbers, and by equipping and deploying troops trained in human rights to areas of displacement where communities have created self-defense militias because of the absence or limited capacity of state security forces.

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- In view of repeated and persistent violations against children by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in breach of international norms and standards, impose targeted measures against the LRA in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1539, 1612, and 1882.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UN presence in Obo, particularly of UNICEF, to monitor and report on the abduction of children by the LRA, and to improve the protection and assistance of children who have returned from captivity.

Reunification: a long journey home

Most of the children interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC who managed to escape from LRA captivity did so after the LRA camp in Garamba National Park in DRC was bombed in December 2008 by the Ugandan government's military force, Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF). The top command of the LRA closed down the camp and divided all abductees into small groups led by one or two commanders. The groups dispersed quickly and into various directions: some went towards South Sudan, some towards southwestern DRC, and some crossed the border into CAR. The groups lived in very rough conditions in the forest and increased their attacks on villages for food and goods. The abduction of children was reportedly ongoing during these attacks.

Children who escaped to South Sudan were helped by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), an armed group in South Sudan; those who escaped to DRC were helped by the UPDF, and those who escaped near the border with CAR were helped by villagers in DRC from the ethnic Zande group. The people from Obo are also Zande and this allowed escapee children from CAR to ask the villagers for help in their own language. All these children had a difficult time returning home because of the distance they had to travel to return, and the amount of time that it took them.

It took David, a 17-year-old boy interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC in Obo, almost six months to get back home. He was initially helped by UPDF who found him hiding in the forest in DRC and took him to a camp for child soldiers, where he spent several weeks.²¹ There he was given food, clothes, and medical attention because he had infected wounds from living in the forest. From there he was driven to Dungu where he was received by a Congolese military commander who called UNICEF, who in turn called Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI). Staff from COOPI drove David to a village near Dungu where he spent several nights with a host family. David was then flown to Bunia, in northeastern DRC, in a UN plane, where he spent three months in a transit center run by COOPI for children demobilized from armed groups. He took sewing classes, received medical attention, and was well fed. He also spoke to a pastor every day who

helped him to understand what had happened to him. From Bunia, David was flown by the UN to a UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) base in Kisangani where he spent two weeks. From Kisangani he was flown to Kinshasa in a UN plane, and was taken by COOPI staff to a center for street children where he spent Christmas and New Year's in 2009. In late January 2010, he was flown by ICRC to Bangui, where he spent one month at Voix du Coeur, a center for street children in Bangui run by a local NGO. ICRC flew him back to Obo in February 2010 where he was finally reunited with his family almost two years after being abducted by the LRA. "My family received me like a child of God," he recalled. "The expression of joy on my father's face is something I will never forget." ●

David's story highlights the need to improve the logistics of repatriation for children who were abducted by the LRA and are trying to return home. Some children have reported that it took them as long to get home as the time that they spent in captivity, sometimes upwards of ten months. Timely and effective repatriation of LRA abductees who are no longer in captivity is especially important for their rehabilitation process and subsequent reintegration back into their communities. To make this happen there must be: (1) efficient coordination between the transit centers where children are sent for assistance after they have been liberated and the transportation providers, which include ICRC, UN agencies, and military forces, who move these children from the transit centers to their final place of reunification with their families; (2) direct humanitarian flights across national borders in LRA-affected countries; and (3) a greater sense of urgency and understanding that the sooner children can be reintegrated into their communities, the sooner they will be able to take steps towards healing from trauma.

In an ongoing study of former child soldiers, Professor Theresa Betancourt of the Harvard School of Public Health has found that the greatest indicators of trauma are the age at which children were taken from their families, their direct engagement in killing, and their endurance of rape.²² In the case of children abducted by the LRA in Obo, all three indicators were present and point to high levels of trauma that would require immediate psychosocial care.

“ I’ve seen my former commander in the market drinking Coca-Cola and talking to the women around him. He wears a Ugandan military uniform like the other Ugandan soldiers, and he carries a weapon. ”

recommendations

(reunification)

UN Country Team in CAR

- Work with UN Country Teams and ICRC in the region to develop efficient regional logistics for reception and family tracing for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity; determine ways to shorten the route, distance, and length of time it takes to get Central African children home.

Impunity: facing LRA perpetrators

The Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) has been fighting the LRA in southeast CAR since mid-2009, under a special agreement between the Central African Republic and Ugandan governments.²³ Its mandate is to track down the top LRA commanders who have been indicted by the International Criminal Court: Joseph Kony, Okot Odhiambo, and Dominic Ongwen. While the protection of civilians in CAR is not part of UPDF’s mandate, its presence in some areas has been perceived as a deterrent to LRA attacks. UPDF has similar bilateral agreements with the governments of DRC and South Sudan. In all three countries, UPDF’s strategy for destroying the LRA has been to encourage defections from within the LRA and to recruit adult ex-LRA combatants into UPDF ranks.²⁴

When interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC, both the UPDF Commander and UPDF Intelligence Officer for CAR Operations, explained that ex-LRA combatants are important military assets for various reasons: (1) they understand Kony’s *modus operandi* because they have grown up with the LRA and are therefore better able to help pursue Kony and predict his future movements; (2) ex-LRA combatants are able to move quickly in the thick, canopy forest where the LRA is active and are therefore better able to track and pursue Kony than UPDF, which does not have appropriate air operations capacity (e.g., helicopters) and is less able to pursue Kony by foot; (3) recruiting ex-LRA combatants into a professional army such as UPDF may prevent them from returning to LRA ranks where their brutality goes unchecked; and (4) if UPDF is to be successful in its efforts to encourage defections from within the LRA as a way to weaken the

group, it cannot detain ex-combatants or there would be no incentive for defections; UPDF has to offer them something better than what they have had with the LRA.²⁵

The practice of recruiting adult ex-LRA combatants into UPDF ranks is not illegal according to international humanitarian law as long as they are not minors. This practice is also in line with the policy of the Government of Uganda to grant amnesty to all LRA combatants who surrender (except the top three commanders).²⁶ However, from the victim’s perspective, the fact that ex-LRA combatants are living in Obo and are working for UPDF is highly traumatic. Several children interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC said that having to live side by side with their former persecutors is extremely painful. It prevents them from forgetting the horror they experienced with the LRA. A boy in Obo said: “I’ve seen my former commander in the market drinking Coca-Cola and talking to the women around him. He wears a Ugandan military uniform like the other Ugandan soldiers, and he carries a weapon.”

The UPDF strategy of recruiting ex-LRA combatants has other negative implications in the community. The local population believes that ex-LRA combatants are “family members” of UPDF soldiers. Therefore they believe that the real purpose of UPDF is to help ex-LRA combatants find their way back home rather than detaining and prosecuting them. The fact that ex-LRA combatants have acted with impunity only to be rewarded with a well-paying job within UPDF is furthering this perception among the people of Obo.

recommendations

(impunity)

Protection Cluster in CAR

- Hold talks with the Uganda People’s Defense Force (UPDF) in Obo to address the issue of the re-traumatization of victims of the LRA in Obo. Quick impact solutions should be considered, such as preventing ex-LRA combatants from leaving the UPDF military base in Obo except as part of tracking teams sent into the forest to pursue the LRA, and ensuring that they have minimal contact with the local population in Obo. The longer-term issues of impunity and accountability on an individual basis should also be discussed.

recruitment or use of child soldiers

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recruitment: refers to compulsory, forced or voluntary conscription or enlistment of children into any kind of armed force or armed group(s) under the age stipulated in the international treaties applicable to the armed force or armed group in question.

use of child soldiers refers to the use of children by armed forces or armed groups in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies, collaborators. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken direct part in hostilities.

MRM Field Manual: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, UNICEF, April 2010.

CAR is party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, both of which prohibit the recruitment of children under age 15 for use in armed conflict.²⁷ CAR is also party to the International Labor Organization's Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention (No.182), which prohibits forced or compulsory recruitment of children under 18 for use in armed conflict.²⁸ In June 2010, CAR was one of six African countries to sign the N'Djamena Declaration, a binding legal document aimed at ending the recruitment of children by all parties to the region's conflicts.²⁹ In September 2010, CAR signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.³⁰ This protocol is particularly important because it seeks to raise the age of recruitment into armed forces from 15 to 18, prohibits non-state armed groups from recruiting and using children under 18 years old in armed conflict, and obliges states to provide children who have participated in armed conflict with any necessary physical and psychological rehabilitation and support for reintegration within society.³¹

The Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)

The Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) is listed in the 2010 UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict as a group that recruits or uses children in violation of relevant international law.³² Formed in December 2008 as a splinter group from the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), another armed group in CAR, CPJP is active in the northeast of the country and controls several zones outside the town of Ndélé. It is the only armed group that has yet to sign a cease-fire agreement or adhere to the 2008 Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the government. The reason given by CPJP for its reluctance to negotiate with the government is that it is still waiting for the government to release details about the alleged assassination of Charles Massi, leader of CPJP, who was arrested in December 2009 and transferred to a prison in Bangui where he later died.


Fighting between CPJP and the government's Central African Armed Forces (FACA) in villages north of Ndélé began in February 2009 and continued throughout the year.³³ CPJP attacked Ndélé in November 2009 and again in April 2010, in an attempt to seize control of the town.

“ There is no information to date on the number of children who may have been recruited by CPJP, or of how many among them are girls. ”

The clashes between CPJP and FACA have caused the forced displacement of civilians and have blocked humanitarian access in the region.³⁴ Today, FACA controls a five kilometer (3.1 mile) radius outside of Ndélé; UFDR, which has signed a peace agreement with the government and is now aligned with FACA, controls from eight to 15 kilometers (4.9-9.3 miles) outside of Ndélé; and CPJP controls the roads from 15 kilometers outside Ndélé (9.3 miles) to the towns of Ngarba and Miamani along the Chadian border.³⁵ Villages located along these roads are considered sympathetic to CPJP, whose exact number of troops remains unknown.³⁶

International NGOs working in Ndélé have affirmed seeing children in their ranks, some as young as ten years old. NGOs have also affirmed the presence of girls among CPJP, but have cautioned Watchlist and IDMC against assuming recruitment of girls as they could be family members of CPJP rebels, and therefore living with them in their bases.

Although the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is in Ndélé, with a minimal staff, a more robust UN presence would allow for the proper monitoring and reporting of children's rights violations in the area. There is no information to date on the number of children who may have been recruited by CPJP, or of how many among them are girls. Equally troubling is the lack of information on the needs of these children, or whether any of them have been victims of sexual violence. Finally, there is no information on the willingness of CPJP to release children from its ranks.

 recommendations (CPJP)

Government of CAR

- Negotiate a cease-fire agreement with the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP. ▶

Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace

- Negotiate a cease-fire agreement with the government that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Release all children under the age of 18 currently serving in CPJP ranks, and end further recruitment and use of children in accordance with international obligations.
- Immediately negotiate, sign, and implement an action plan with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers and other violations against children.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Strongly advocate for an increased UN presence in Ndélé by deploying UNICEF and UNHCR staff to help monitor and report on the recruitment of children by CPJP, and to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict and of displaced communities in the area.
- Work with the MRM Task Force in CAR to develop and implement an action plan for the release of children from CPJP ranks.

Community self-defense militias

FACA lacks the proper training, equipment, and troops needed to fulfill its mandate of protecting civilians. FACA is thought to number only about 5,000 troops, but only half of these are on duty at any given time,³⁷ and very few are deployed to the country's conflict zones. The limited capacity of FACA includes a lack of vehicles and fuel, and a lack of communications equipment. In addition, FACA troops are not authorized to patrol beyond five kilometers (3.1 miles) from their posts.

In the absence of a functioning national security force, the local population in conflict-affected areas in CAR has had no choice but to create community self-defense militias to protect themselves from attacks by armed groups,

“Children may find themselves on the front lines of combat when conducting night patrols with their parents as part of their role in the self-defense militias.”

Zaraguina (criminal gangs), and foreign armed groups like the LRA. The role of the self-defense militias is to patrol their areas and alert FACA if there is danger, but they are not supposed to participate in direct combat. Members of self-defense militias interviewed by Watchlist and IDMC in Loura, a village located near Bocaranga, and in Obo affirmed that they are backed by local authorities and representatives of the Ministry of Defense, who see them as auxiliaries of the army.³⁸ Self-defense militias are listed in the 2010 UN Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict as groups that recruit or use children in violation of relevant international law.³⁹

Some diplomats in Bangui have played down the government support of community self-defense militias as negligible because the government does not provide the militias compensation or weapons. But the government is not only encouraging the creation of these groups, it is also attributing titles and name badges to them, and providing them with ammunition for their homemade hunting weapons, which they use to defend themselves. This is the case of the Self-Defense Group in Bozoum, whose management committee received name badges from the *sous-préfet* of the region.⁴⁰ The President of the Self-Defense Group in Obo affirmed that his group was visited by high-ranking officials from the Ministry of Defense and was given ammunition for their hunting weapons and materials for conducting night patrols, including flashlights, coffee, and sugar.⁴¹ In President Bozizé's 2010 speech in Obo celebrating World Food Day, he praised the bravery of the local self-defense militia and encouraged them to continue the work of defending their communities from attacks by the LRA.⁴²

The fact that community self-defense militias are operating in a region already saturated with arms – 50,000 illicit small arms are reported to be circulating in the country⁴³ – only intensifies the protection problems already facing civilians. The recruitment of children by community self-defense militias is only one problem; another is that self-defense militias have the potential to become parties to the conflict if there is renewed fighting between FACA and armed opposition groups. Finally, self-defense militias are operating outside of the law because both the CAR constitution and the CAR penal code contain provisions that criminalize the activities of self-defense militias as well as the fabrication of homemade weapons.⁴⁴

When discussing the potential of self-defense militias to become parties to conflict, a Central African lawyer stated in no uncertain terms: “We don't need to go as far as DRC to find an example of an armed group that started out as a self-defense militia. We have our own home-grown example here in CAR. The Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy started out as a self-defense militia in Paoua without any ideological or political ambitions. It was because of external circumstances that they became one of the main armed opposition groups trying to overthrow the government of Francois Bozizé.”⁴⁵

It is difficult to estimate the number of children associated with self-defense militias in CAR, but the UN reports that in some villages 10 to 15 percent of the population is involved.⁴⁶ During interviews conducted by Watchlist and IDMC in January and February 2011, self-defense militias in villages near Bocaranga and in Obo affirmed that they recruit children as young as 12 years old. One of the difficulties of discussing the illegality of recruitment and use of children is that the weapons used by self-defense militias are homemade hunting rifles that children in CAR use regularly to hunt for food. Another dilemma is that children and their parents feel a great sense of pride to have been called upon by the government to protect their communities and their families. Conflict-affected communities often see self-defense militias as their only source of security.

Children may find themselves on the front lines of combat when conducting night patrols with their parents as part of their role in the self-defense militias. While the militias are not supposed to participate in direct combat, often when they alert FACA about armed groups in the area, FACA is unable to provide security because it lacks the troops or because of the limits imposed on its movement. Another reason FACA troops may not respond is that their limited numbers may make them afraid to face a stronger enemy. The President of the Self-Defense Group in Obo affirmed that they have had to engage LRA rebels directly because FACA soldiers “are the first to run for cover when there is trouble.”⁴⁷ It is worth noting that the permanent FACA base in Obo only has ten men, none of whom are authorized to patrol beyond their limit of a five kilometer (3.1 mile) radius from the center of town.

Another point of concern is that children in self-defense militias who are called upon to conduct night patrols are no longer able to attend school during the day. By having to work at night to defend their communities and thereby unable to attend school during the day, these children are missing important developmental stages and their long-term well-being is being jeopardized.



recommendations

(community self-defense militias)

Government of CAR

- Strengthen the capacity of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) by increasing troop numbers, and by equipping and deploying troops trained in human rights to areas of displacement where communities have had to create self-defense militias because of the absence or limited capacity of state security forces.
- End government support of community self-defense militias that carry out security functions legally assigned to the army. Ensure that these militias release the children they have recruited, and sign and implement action plans with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Work with the MRM Task Force in CAR to develop and implement an action plan for the release of children from self-defense militias.

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Support the UN Country Team to develop and implement an action plan for the release of children from self-defense militias.

The Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD)

The Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD) is an armed group that operates in the northwest of CAR. Formed in 2006 during the armed insurgency against President Bozizé, APRD was the last of three rebel coalitions to enter the country's peace process. In 2008, APRD signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the government, participated in the 2008 national dialogue for peace known as the "Inclusive Political Dialogue,"⁴⁸ and in 2009 joined President Bozizé's newly formed unity government. Jean-Jacques Démafouth, who served as former President Patassé's Minister of Defense, is APRD's political leader.

In February 2007, APRD told Human Rights Watch that it would demobilize child soldiers from its ranks if their protection and reintegration into communities could be guaranteed.⁴⁹ In March and June 2007, it requested assistance from the UN Country Team to demobilize about 150 children, including girls. Despite two clear indications from APRD that it was willing to demobilize children, formal disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) procedures for children were delayed. According to the UN, delays were due to ongoing insecurity⁵⁰ and a deadlock in the peace negotiations between APRD and the government.⁵¹

In May 2008, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict visited CAR and met with APRD leaders who agreed to prepare a list of all children in their ranks to be demobilized. By October 2008, the UN had prepared an action plan for APRD and was waiting for government approval when the CAR Ministry of Defense put the action plan on hold, and requested that all other parties listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict be included within the action plan.⁵² To date, there has been no follow up of this "broader" action plan and no formal individual action plans have been signed with APRD or any other armed group.

“ Donors need to be made aware that DDR programs are not successful unless the reintegration component of DDR is adequately funded. ”

While APRD has complied with the demands of the UN to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers by its group, including granting child protection organizations full access to monitor the presence of children in APRD ranks, APRD cannot yet be de-listed from the UN Secretary-General's annual report because it has not signed an action plan with the UN, which is one of the required criteria for de-listing. This situation can be remedied by the signing of an action plan between APRD and the UN to prevent further recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Despite the absence of a formal action plan with APRD, UNICEF and partner NGOs launched a children's DDR program in 2009 to release children from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga. Financed by the Peacebuilding Fund, this children's DDR program was not in any way connected to the DDR program for adults being managed by UNDP in CAR. APRD provided a list of children for verification by the UN and identified several cantonment sites for the release of children.

From January 2009 – July 2010, the Danish Refugee Council facilitated the demobilization of 417 children in Paoua (405 boys and 12 girls), 211 of who spent an average of one month in a transit center near Paoua before being reunified with their families. The other 206 children were reunified with their families directly without going through the transit center because their villages were located close to the cantonment sites chosen by APRD.⁵³ From May – October 2009, the International Rescue Committee facilitated the demobilization of 108 children in Bocaranga (84 boys and 24 girls). All 108 children spent an average of three weeks in the transit center near Bocaranga before being reunified with their families.⁵⁴

A total of 525 children were demobilized in Paoua and Bocaranga. All of them received reintegration assistance including training in agricultural and pastoralist skills, as well as in trades such as carpentry and sewing, or

temporary support in returning to school. However, these activities were too short in length and in scale to provide demobilized children with the sustainable, long-term solutions that would prevent them from re-enlisting if there is a return to violence, protect them from other forms of exploitation, and prepare them to contribute to their country's future economic development. The activities also failed to account for the limited job opportunities in a country whose socio-economic structures have been destroyed by armed conflict.

For example, three teenage boys interviewed in Paoua by Watchlist and IDMC are participating in a carpentry workshop internship program in Paoua as part of their reintegration package. Once the internship at the carpentry workshop is finished, the demobilized teenagers will likely be unable to find work as carpenters or set up their own carpentry workshops.

One of the boys, Paul, explained: “I have learned the initial skills to become a carpenter, but the program isn't long enough because I still need time to practice what I have learned. Also, my family and I don't have any money and so I cannot buy the tools that I would need to work as a carpenter. It's impossible for me to set up my own workshop. And there aren't enough workshops in Paoua for all of us to get work.”⁵⁵ ●

The development and implementation of sustainable reintegration programs remains a challenge in Paoua and Bocaranga for the children who have been demobilized from APRD ranks. Significant targeted funding is needed to develop and implement livelihoods programs that will have a long-term positive impact on the lives of demobilized children. Donors need to be made aware that DDR programs are not successful unless the reintegration component of DDR is adequately funded.



recommendations (APRD)

Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD)

- Immediately negotiate, sign, and implement an action plan with the UN to prevent further recruitment and use of child soldiers.

UN Secretary-General

- Given the release of children from APRD ranks, and APRD's attempts to conclude an action plan with the UN, request that the UN Country Team renew efforts to develop and implement an action plan with APRD to prevent further recruitment and use of children, with a view to de-listing APRD from the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Work with the MRM Task Force in CAR to develop and implement an action plan to prevent further recruitment and use of children by APRD.

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Support the UN Country Team in negotiating an action plan to prevent further recruitment and use of children by APRD.

UN Peacebuilding Commission

- In light of the Commission's efforts to rebuild communities affected by conflict and to prevent a return to violence, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund sustainable reintegration programs for children demobilized from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga. ►



European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)

- Assess humanitarian needs in districts near Paoua and Bocaranga, in the interest of funding much-needed reintegration programs for demobilized children and providing assistance to the displaced communities from which they come.

Donor Countries

- Ensure flexible and sustainable funding for reintegration programs for children demobilized from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga.

attacks against schools

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attacks against schools or hospitals: include the targeting of schools or medical facilities that cause the total or partial destruction of such facilities. Other interferences to the normal operation of the facility may also be reported, such as the occupation, shelling, targeting for propaganda of, or otherwise causing harm to schools or medical facilities or its personnel.

note: A “school” denotes a recognizable education facility or learning site. Education facilities and learning sites must be recognized and known by the community as a learning space and marked by visible boundaries. “Medical facilities” are places where the sick and wounded are collected and /or provided with health care services.

MRM Field Manual: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, UNICEF, April 2010.

Access to primary education in CAR is remarkably low. Armed conflict and violence have destroyed an already fragile education system in CAR, where primary enrollment rates have not improved in 15 years. School buildings have been looted, burned, or destroyed, and qualified teachers have left their towns for the safety of Bangui. In addition, the government spends less than 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product on education, which is below the African continent’s average.⁵⁶ Likewise, humanitarian donors have not sufficiently funded the education sector. Only 33 percent of the sum requested for education in the 2010 Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for CAR was funded as of March 2011.⁵⁷ In its 2010 report, the Global Campaign for Education, a network of organizations that includes Save the Children Alliance, CARE International, Oxfam International, Plan International, and VSO International, among others, ranked CAR as one of the ten worst places in the world to be a student, citing chronic under-investment in education.⁵⁸

Even before the outbreak of the most recent armed conflict in 2005, social services were virtually non-existent in the north of the country. The education sector serves as a case in point: prior to the conflict, 40 percent of children in the north were enrolled in school. In 2007, in the middle of the conflict, an assessment mission found that only ten percent of children were still going to school.⁵⁹ Today, UNICEF estimates that nearly half of all primary school-aged children in CAR are not enrolled in school.⁶⁰ Girls in particular are victims of ongoing discrimination that impedes their ability to go to school, a violation of their basic rights.⁶¹ Child labor and cultural practices such as early marriage and resulting pregnancies force girls to stay at home to care for young children and conduct household duties. For children who are enrolled in school, the lack of teachers and school materials, including books, is an ongoing obstacle to education. The current ratio for the country is about two books for every nine students⁶² and an average of 90 children per teacher.⁶³

The UN and international NGOs working in CAR have reported attacks against schools in conflict-affected areas of the country.⁶⁴ While schools in CAR have not been systematically targeted, they have been looted, burned, or destroyed when whole villages have been attacked by

“ Children from Koun Bam II who are still going to school despite the presence of APRD are routinely taken out of classes and asked to run errands for the rebels... ”

armed forces or groups. During such attacks, health posts have also been looted, burned, or destroyed. An important gap in the gathering of information on attacks against schools is that information has not been specifically or systematically collected in ways that could be used to inform the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM).

School closures

In conflict-affected communities, many schools remain closed due to insecurity and because few qualified teachers are willing to work in areas of displacement.⁶⁵ Villages on the roads north of Ndélé, for example, have had no access to education for nearly two years as all schools have remained closed.⁶⁶ The response by humanitarian organizations has been to implement emergency education programs, also known as “bush schools.” These temporary school structures are set up in areas of displacement or in rehabilitated school structures in villages that are deemed secure. In both cases, schools are run by the community and children are taught by parents, as teachers are not willing to work in areas of displacement or have fled conflict areas for safety. UNICEF and partner NGOs train parents to work as teachers (known in French as *maître-parents*), train parent’s associations to manage the payment of school fees and the salaries of the *maître-parents* on behalf of the community, and provide students with textbooks and other school materials. Communities are sometimes too poor to pay the salaries of the *maître-parents*, and instead pay them “in-kind” by farming their land for them or by giving them agricultural products from the harvest. In some cases, *maître-parents* have closed schools because parents have been unable to pay fees.

Military occupation of schools

Some schools have been occupied or used by armed groups, preventing children from attending classes regularly. Current examples include the village of Koun Bam II, located 60 kilometers (37.2 miles) from Bocaranga, where APRD has set up a military camp right behind the school building, without consulting village leaders or the school director. Children from Koun Bam II who are still going to school despite the presence of APRD are routinely taken out of classes and asked to run errands for the rebels, such as buying cigarettes, food, and soft drinks at the market. The school director told Watchlist and IDMC

that several families from Koun Bam II are no longer allowing their girls to attend school because they fear sexual violence or abuse by APRD rebels.⁶⁷ In Bocaranga, FACA is currently using a nursery school as a military base in the evenings. The soldiers occupying the nursery school are part of a new detachment sent to Bocaranga to reinforce existing troops. While the military presence in or around schools does not always create a major disruption of education services, it blurs the lines between civilian and military objectives and makes schools vulnerable to attack by other parties in the conflict.

The school in the village of Nana-Barya, located about 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Paoua, is currently being used as an APRD meeting place.⁶⁸ APRD chose to have a meeting place in Nana-Barya because it is strategically located at an intersection of roads that diverge and lead west to Cameroon and north to Chad. Most villagers from Nana-Barya fled to Cameroon in 2007 because of fighting between APRD and FACA. Attacks in June 2010 by nomadic Peulh herders during the migration of their cattle towards Chad forced remaining villagers to flee to camp sites near their fields.⁶⁹ In March 2011, UNHCR reported that 93 families have returned to Nana-Barya from Cameroon, but have no access to drinking water or health care, and most eat only one meal a day.⁷⁰ The use of the school by APRD is preventing classes from taking place regularly and returnee children from attending school. Until 2010, APRD had also occupied schools in nearby villages, including Beboura, Kebe, and Korozian. NGOs working in the region advocated with APRD and managed to have those schools liberated.⁷¹

Attacks against teachers

Attacks against teachers have been documented. In Bangbah, a village located 60 kilometers (37.2 miles) from Ndélé, CPJP closely monitored the director of the school to prevent him from providing the government with information about the security situation. In September 2010, after two years of living under close surveillance, he was forced to flee to Ndélé after his family was threatened.⁷² Another documented incident of attacks against education personnel took place in Haoussa village located 12 kilometers (7.4 miles) from Ndélé. In March 2010, the village was attacked by CPJP and residents were forced to flee into the forest for their safety. The director of the school was abducted and his pregnant wife was killed by CPJP.⁷³



recommendations

(attacks against schools)

Government of CAR

- Ensure that the armed groups that are now aligned with the government as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement do not use school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)

- Cease all attacks against schools, students, teachers, and other educational personnel.

Popular Army for the Restoration of Democracy (APRD)

- Cease the use of school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- Urge all armed forces and groups to cease the use of school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Establish a secure information-sharing system with the protection and education clusters, as well as with the GBV and child protection sub-clusters, both in Bangui and at the field level, to ensure that any information related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 collected or shared with the clusters is also shared with the MRM Task Force.
- Develop technical trainings designed specifically for education NGOs to build their capacity to monitor and report on attacks against schools in CAR.

denial of humanitarian access to children

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denial of humanitarian access to children:

is the intentional barring by physical force or administrative barriers of the unhindered and safe movement of personnel and humanitarian material into and out of the affected area to enable the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons in need. Humanitarian assistance includes all acts, activities, and the human and material resources for the provision of goods and services indispensable for the survival and the fulfillment of essential needs of conflict-affected persons. Include the denial of medical, food, education, other essential supplies into areas, threats to and killing / injuring of humanitarian workers, and other significant impediments to humanitarian agencies that affect access to children. Denial of humanitarian access also includes incidents where the child is denied access to assistance including food, medical and education services. Denial through administrative, political or military obstacles including check points, administrative procedures. This can be directly or indirectly (e.g. the child is denied a permit or a care giver who needs to accompany the child).

MRM Field Manual: Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, UNICEF, April 2010.

Humanitarian access is a big challenge in CAR for both logistical and security reasons. The long distances between Bangui and conflict-affected communities, and the collapsed road infrastructure make transport cumbersome and costly. There are only 700 kilometers (nearly 435 miles) of paved roads in the country.⁷⁴ During the rainy season, which runs from about May to October, most roads to the north of the capital are impassable, and humanitarian organizations can only access conflict-affected areas by air. The travel time to LRA-affected areas in the southeast is four to five days by car from Bangui, preventing a timely response to the needs of children affected by armed conflict. The humanitarian air service, UNHAS, is crucial but faces continual funding shortages.

The impact of these difficult conditions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance is exacerbated by the fact that IDPs do not live in concentrated groups. This makes the distribution of goods and services time-consuming and labor-intensive, increasing the cost of humanitarian

operations.⁷⁵ In addition to these logistical constraints, the government of CAR has imposed military restrictions in some areas to counter insecurity which have further impeded humanitarian access, and UN agencies have to use armed escorts for the delivery of assistance.

Access constraints

CPJP-affected areas

The restrictions and bans on humanitarian access have left displaced children in CPJP-controlled areas unprotected and without access to humanitarian assistance, including health care, water and sanitation, and education. The lack of humanitarian access has also prevented the monitoring and reporting of violations committed against children under UN Security Council Resolution 1612, making it impossible to assess the number of children that may have been recruited by CPJP, how many among them are girls, or whether any of them have been victims of sexual violence.

“ Several attempts have been made to secure humanitarian access in areas controlled by CPJP, but none of them have been successful to date. ”

While CPJP has not expressly denied humanitarian organizations access to displaced communities, it has been unable to assure the security of NGOs travelling in its area of control. Until 2009, the government had not impeded humanitarian access outside of Ndélé. This changed in November 2009 when criminal gangs kidnapped two French aid workers in the northeast town of Birao.⁷⁶ That same month, CPJP attacked military posts inside Ndélé causing the temporary withdrawal of humanitarian organizations. As a result, the government imposed indefinite restrictions on humanitarian access, which was no longer allowed beyond a five kilometer (3.1 mile) radius outside of town.⁷⁷

CPJP attacked Ndélé again in April 2010. This forced humanitarian organizations to relocate their assistance programs for the displaced to other parts of the country; they had not been able to access displaced communities since November 2009. However, NGOs kept their bases open in Ndélé and continued to provide assistance to the people of Ndélé and to IDPs living in town.⁷⁸ The government ban on humanitarian access was lifted in July 2010, by which time displaced communities had been without assistance for over eight months.⁷⁹

Clashes between CPJP and FACA continued after the government ban was lifted in July 2010.⁸⁰ Several NGO vehicles were ambushed during this time, but it is unclear who conducted the attacks. In December 2010, the government imposed new restrictions on humanitarian access to the road between Ndélé and Ngarba, and in January 2011 to the road between Ndélé and Miamani. Humanitarian organizations now must check in with FACA to request permission if they wish to travel on those roads to displacement sites.

Several attempts have been made to secure humanitarian access in areas controlled by CPJP, but none of them have been successful to date. In January 2009 and January 2010, the Sultan of Ndélé and other local authorities held unsuccessful mediation talks with CPJP leadership.⁸¹ In February 2010, the Minister for Territorial Administration tried to hold peace talks with CPJP, and in June 2010, the Humanitarian Coordinator in CAR led a joint UN mission to Ndélé to negotiate humanitarian access, among other issues.⁸² One of the main reasons given for these repeated failures is that CPJP field commanders operate autonomously, without clear leadership, command,

or control,⁸³ making such negotiation attempts almost impossible to conclude. Another reason is that the government of CAR has not shown sufficient political interest or will to conclude a cease-fire agreement.

LRA-affected areas

In the LRA-affected areas, restrictions on humanitarian access have been put in place by both the government and the UN. In Obo, like in Ndélé, NGOs must check in with FACA on a daily basis to request permission for access. Without permission, they are not allowed to circulate beyond a five kilometer radius (3.1 miles) outside of Obo. UN agencies have had to use armed escorts to deliver humanitarian assistance.⁸⁴ This measure is the result of several attacks against humanitarian aid workers. In September 2009, a COOPI vehicle was attacked by the LRA. The driver and a COOPI employee were killed.⁸⁵ In May 2010, a World Food Program (WFP) truck was attacked by the LRA between the towns of Dembia and Rafai. Two WFP workers died in the attack and two others were injured.⁸⁶

In 2010, insecurity and restrictions on humanitarian access marked the steady erosion of humanitarian space in CAR.⁸⁷ The lack of presence of UN agencies in places like Ndélé and Obo means that protection mechanisms for children affected by armed conflict have not been put in place, that monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations committed against children under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 is non-existent, and that urgently needed assistance programs have not been prioritized. UNHAS and ICRC have still been able to conduct weekly flights to Ndélé, as well as to LRA-affected towns, including Bangassou, Zemio, Rafai, and Obo. UN agencies should be given security clearance to travel to these areas by air, to conduct joint needs assessment missions, and work with implementing partners to improve assistance to children in conflict-affected areas.



recommendations

(access constraints)

Government of CAR and the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP)

- Negotiate a cease-fire agreement that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- Encourage the government to negotiate a cease-fire agreement with CPJP that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.

UN Country Team in CAR

- Conduct negotiations with CPJP to secure unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Strongly advocate for an increased UN presence in Ndélé by deploying UNICEF and UNHCR staff to monitor and report on the recruitment of children by CPJP, and to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict and of displaced communities in the area.
- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UN presence in Obo, particularly of UNICEF, to monitor and report on the abduction of children by the LRA, and to improve the protection and assistance of children who have returned from captivity.

Impact on needs

The lack of humanitarian access in Ndélé has left children who are displaced in CPJP-controlled areas unprotected and without access to humanitarian assistance, including health care, water and sanitation, and education.

For example, displaced children living in CPJP controlled areas have not had access to schools for the past two years.⁸⁸ Some displaced children have been sent to live in Ndélé, only to find themselves in precarious conditions among host families. Other displaced children living near Ndélé are at risk of being attacked when they walk 10 – 15 kilometers (about 6 – 9 miles) each day to attend school. Many displaced children living in Ndélé or in nearby fields are unable to attend school at all because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees.

Theresa, an eight-year-old displaced girl has a strong message for President Bozizé: “After our village was attacked, my family and I had to live in the forest for more than a month. We had nothing to eat and I had to drink water from the swamp. My parents are still living in the forest but they sent me here so I could go to school. If you bring peace, my family and I will be able to go back to our village. We were never hungry in our village, and I always rested when I went to sleep.” ●

In Obo, the humanitarian assistance that has reached the population has been sporadic and insufficient. WFP faced a major funding shortfall in 2010 and interrupted its food distributions. There are only two international NGOs working in Obo providing emergency education and health services to the 6,000 IDPs living in Obo in five IDP camps, and to about 400 refugees from DRC.⁸⁹ Displaced families in three different IDP camps visited by Watchlist and IDMC all spoke of an average waiting time of five days to get medical care at the hospital in Obo.

Finally, psychosocial care for victims of the LRA is the most neglected of all assistance needs in Obo, and has been consistently ignored by donors in all conflict-affected areas in CAR. COOPI has identified high levels of trauma among victims of the LRA, not only from abduction, forced recruitment, and sexual violence, but also because of the atrocities most victims were forced to commit.⁹⁰ While COOPI has found that the acceptance rate by families of children who were abducted is high, the same is not true for women who were married in Obo before they were abducted.

recommendations

(impact on needs)

UN Country Team in CAR

- Strongly advocate for an increased UN presence in Ndélé by deploying UNICEF and UNHCR staff to monitor and report on the recruitment of children by CPJP, and to improve the protection of children affected by armed conflict and of displaced communities in the area.
- Strongly advocate for the establishment of a UN presence in Obo, particularly of UNICEF, to monitor and report on the abduction of children by the LRA, and to improve the protection and assistance of children who have returned from captivity.

UN Peacebuilding Commission

- In light of the Commission's efforts to rebuild communities affected by conflict and to prevent a return to violence, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund urgently needed psychosocial programs for children in southeast CAR who were abducted by the LRA and are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.

US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

- Pursuant to the declaration of disaster made by the U.S. Embassy in Bangui on January 27, 2011 regarding displacement caused by the LRA, release USAID/OFDA funds for urgently needed psychosocial programs to benefit children in southeast CAR abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence. Funding should also be released for agriculture, food security, and health services to benefit IDPs in LRA-affected areas of southeast CAR. ▶

European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)

- Assess humanitarian needs in LRA-affected areas of southeast CAR and re-evaluate existing programs accordingly to help strengthen the humanitarian response to children affected by armed conflict.
- Fund urgently needed psychosocial programs in southeast CAR for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.

Donor Countries

- Ensure flexible and sustainable funding for prevention programs for children at risk of recruitment in Ndélé, and for psychosocial programs in southeast CAR for children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.



part II: protecting children from violations

The inability of the Central African government to protect children from violations is not related to the lack of legal norms but to the failure to respect, protect, and fulfill these rights. As with national laws, the regional and international commitments made by CAR to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflict are of little consequence if they are not properly enforced.

Political challenges, including bad governance, armed conflict, and insecurity, as well as corruption and under-investment in public institutions have made it difficult for CAR to respect its legal obligations.⁹¹

The UN has a role to play by encouraging CAR to meet its obligations and by holding the government accountable through review mechanisms and even sanctions. Donors have a role to play by ensuring flexible and sustainable funding for key protection and assistance programs for children affected by armed conflict.

UN security council resolution 1612

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Field-level: The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)

Since 1999, the UN Security Council has adopted seven resolutions to improve the protection of children during armed conflict. In 2005, through UN Security Council Resolution 1612, the UN Security Council created a monitoring and reporting mechanism (MRM) to collect timely and reliable information on six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict, including killing or maiming, recruitment or use of child soldiers, attacks against schools, rape or other grave sexual violence, abduction, and the denial of humanitarian access.

Until 2009, the MRM was implemented in countries where parties to conflict were listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict for widespread recruitment and use of child soldiers. UN Security Council Resolution 1882 expanded the triggers for listing parties to conflict by requesting that parties

engaging in patterns of killing and maiming and/or rape and other sexual violence against children in situations of armed conflict also be listed in the UN Secretary-General's annual reports. The MRM is implemented through UN-led task forces comprised of UN agencies, and sometimes NGOs and civil society organizations, which collect and verify information on the six grave violations. The UN has established the MRM in 13 countries, including CAR.

The UN Country Team in CAR established the MRM Task Force in 2008. However, the Task Force did not become operational until 2010, after the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in CAR (BINUCA) recruited a Child Protection Adviser to work alongside UNICEF to co-chair the MRM Task Force. Today, members of the Task Force include BINUCA, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA, and OCHA. While the MRM Task Force is now operational, it has faced four important challenges in the monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations committed against children in a timely manner.

These challenges are:

- (1) **Lack of awareness and knowledge of the MRM by UN agencies in CAR.** This has prevented UN agencies from committing significant time and human resources to the MRM Task Force. For example, they have not attached staff that have decision-making authority or are in CAR on long-term contracts.
- (2) **Ongoing insecurity and restrictions on humanitarian access in several conflict-affected areas.** This has prevented the MRM Task Force from collecting and verifying information on the six grave violations committed against children in areas such as Ndélé and Obo where the UN is not sufficiently present. This is particularly important because the MRM is restricted to using only UN-verified information in its reports.
- (3) **Lack of NGO participation in the MRM Task Force.** Many NGOs were reluctant to join the MRM Task Force when it was first created in 2008 because the Task Force did not have systems in place to guarantee the protection of sensitive information about individual protection cases. This is of particular importance in CAR, where there are very few NGOs working on the ground, making it relatively easy for armed groups to know which NGOs reported violations and where. This could jeopardize the safety of NGO staff and beneficiaries.

Today, however, NGOs have not yet been formally asked to join the MRM Task Force, as it is trying to resolve internal issues related to a lack of funding and gaps in human resources. The scarcity of protection-mandated NGOs working specifically on children's issues in CAR also means that the MRM Task Force will need to invest resources in building the capacity of NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations.

(4) Inadequate MRM funding and gaps in human resources. This has prevented BINUCA's child protection department from carrying out MRM field missions to collect or verify information. The lack of MRM funding has also prevented BINUCA's child protection department from conducting MRM technical trainings that would build the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations, including how to monitor and report on attacks against schools.

The policy recommendations outlined below are aimed to help resolve the challenges faced by the MRM Task Force in CAR, so that it can be more successful in monitoring and reporting on the six grave violations against children in a timely manner, thereby supporting UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs to improve the protection and assistance of children affected by armed conflict in CAR.

recommendations (MRM)

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- Reinforce BINUCA's child protection component with the necessary financial and human resources to carry out MRM field missions and conduct MRM technical trainings that will strengthen the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict. ►

UN Secretary-General

- Urge the Secretary-General's Special Representative to the Central African Republic to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of the MRM in CAR by requesting that UN agencies that are members of the MRM Task Force commit significant time and human resources to the MRM technical group, including by attaching staff that have decision-making authority and are in CAR on long-term contracts.

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Secure the participation of national and international NGOs in the MRM Task Force by addressing their concerns regarding confidentiality and the safety of sharing sensitive information, and by providing them with technical trainings that will build their capacity to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.
- Decentralize the process of verifying information collected through the MRM by making field-based UN agencies responsible for verifying information coming from their respective geographical areas of operation.
- Establish a secure information-sharing system with the protection and education clusters, and the GBV and child protection sub-clusters, both in Bangui and at the field level, to ensure that any issues related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 collected or shared with the clusters is also shared with the MRM Task Force.
- Develop technical trainings designed specifically for education NGOs to build their capacity to monitor and report on attacks against schools in CAR. ►

- Work with UNICEF to develop trainings on the MRM and the six grave violations committed against children for armed forces and groups, to inform them about the mechanism and to alert them to the fact UN agencies and NGOs will be monitoring and reporting on issues related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882.

UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA)

- Ensure that BINUCA's child protection component has the necessary financial and human resources to carry out MRM field missions and conduct MRM technical trainings that will strengthen the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.

UNICEF

- Commit the necessary financial and human resources, including key staff on long-term contracts, to adequately co-lead the MRM Task Force in CAR.
- Work with the protection cluster to ensure that the newly reactivated child protection sub-cluster can access CAP appeals for funding for the MRM.

Donor Countries

- Ensure flexible and sustainable funding for the MRM process in CAR to ensure that the capacity of NGOs to monitor and report on children's rights violations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 is adequately strengthened.

The Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

Through UN Security Council Resolution 1612, the UN Security Council also created the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Working Group consists of the 15 UN Security Council member states. The responsibility of the Working Group is to review MRM reports and make recommendations for action (called "conclusions") to the UN Security Council regarding parties to conflict that are in violation of international norms in the particular country under review. The potential actions that can be taken by the UN Security Council are outlined in a "toolkit" and include letters or appeals to parties concerned, demarches to armed forces or groups, information briefings by experts, open or closed meetings with concerned parties, submission of information to existing UN sanctions committees, sanctions or targeted measures, and field visits by either the UN Security Council or the Working Group.⁹²

On July 13, 2009, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict submitted its first set of recommendations on CAR to the UN Security Council, outlining specific actions to be taken by the government of CAR, the UN Secretary-General, the Peacebuilding Commission, and the World Bank and other donors.⁹³ These recommendations reflect key concerns about building the capacity of national security forces; ending the recruitment and use of children by local self-defense militias; adopting national legislation and ratifying international conventions on the recruitment and use of child soldiers; coordination with the government on child protection concerns (MRM and DDR for children); action plans and dialogue with non-state armed groups; punishment of perpetrators; strengthening of the MRM Taskforce; and allocating funds for improving the reintegration and rehabilitation of demobilized children.

Only three of the Working Group's recommendations have been implemented thus far. The government of CAR has signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. BINUCA has recruited a child protection adviser to strengthen its child protection capacity, and the Peacebuilding Fund has allocated funds for

children's DDR programs in CAR. The UN Secretary-General is scheduled to submit his next country-specific report on children and armed conflict in CAR to the UN Security Council in April 2011.⁹⁴ This will provide the Working Group with an opportunity to make new recommendations for action in CAR.



recommendations

(the working group on children and armed conflict)

UN Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict

- Reinforce BINUCA's child protection component with the necessary financial and human resources to carry out MRM field missions and conduct MRM technical trainings that will strengthen the capacity of national and international NGOs to monitor and report on the six grave violations committed against children during armed conflict.
- In view of repeated and persistent violations against children by the LRA in breach of international norms and standards, impose targeted measures against the LRA in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1539, 1612, and 1882.
- Encourage the government to negotiate a cease-fire agreement with CPJP that will restore unconditional humanitarian access to displaced communities living in zones outside of Ndélé currently controlled by CPJP.
- Encourage the government to end its support of community self-defense militias that carry out security functions legally assigned to the army. Ensure that these militias release the children they have recruited, and sign and implement action plans with the UN to end all recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- Urge all armed forces and groups to cease the use of school buildings or school property as bases for military operations.

other UN mechanisms

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The Peacebuilding Commission

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) was established in 2005 by the UN General Assembly. It is an inter-governmental advisory body that supports peace building efforts in countries emerging from conflict, whose governments have asked for assistance from the international community. The PBC mobilizes resources to support recovery, reconstruction, and development projects in those countries, and drafts long-term strategies with each respective government to implement them. In addition, the Peacebuilding Fund, under the control of the UN Secretary-General, was created to ensure the immediate release of resources required to launch peacebuilding activities and recovery efforts.⁹⁵

In June 2008, CAR was placed on the PBC agenda alongside Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau. The Belgian Ambassador to the UN was elected Chair of the PBC Country-Specific Configuration for CAR.

In consultation with the government of CAR, the PBC identified CAR's key peacebuilding priorities as the need for 1) good governance and rule of law projects to ensure that basic human rights are met; 2) development projects to revitalize economic areas and reduce poverty; and 3) security sector reform, including demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of combatants.⁹⁶

In March 2009, the PBC and the government of CAR signed a three-year Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding document, outlining priority actions, stakeholder commitments, and desired results.⁹⁷ The approval of the Strategic Framework led to the allocation of US \$10 million by the Peacebuilding Fund, of which US \$2 million was allocated for children's DDR programs in CAR, which emphasized the release of children from armed groups as well as their reintegration into civilian life.⁹⁸

In March 2011, the PBC conducted a second review of progress made in implementing the Strategic Framework. It acknowledged exceedingly slow progress on the ground because of preparations for the presidential election held January 2011.⁹⁹ Despite the delays, the PBC is encouraged by the initial achievements made in the country. Looking ahead, it will refocus its attention on security sector reform by strengthening government institutions and continuing to support good governance and development by focusing on socio-economic stabilization. The PBC will also assist the government in creating DDR programs and strategies that are inclusive of all affected populations and which focus on socio-economic development.

While the agreements and commitments specified in the Strategic Framework and subsequent reviews are important, their slow implementation on the ground has had a negative impact on the lives of children affected by armed conflict in CAR, as there are still urgent needs that have not been met. While the PBC's second review does not mention a specific agenda for child protection or include recommendations for improving the children's DDR program, the Working Group has urged the PBC to prioritize the situation of children in all its efforts and activities in CAR.¹⁰⁰



recommendations

(the peacebuilding commission)

UN Peacebuilding Commission

- In light of the Commission's efforts to rebuild communities affected by conflict and to prevent a return to violence, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund sustainable reintegration programs for children demobilized from APRD ranks in Paoua and Bocaranga. The PBC should also fund urgently needed psychosocial programs for children in southeast CAR abducted by the LRA who were released from captivity, including girls who suffered rape and other sexual violence.
- In light of the Commission's promotion of good governance, rule of law, and security sector reform, as outlined in the Commission's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in CAR, fund the implementation of the MRM in CAR to ensure that the capacity of NGOs to monitor and report on children's rights violations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 is adequately strengthened.

The Protection Cluster

The cluster approach is a coordination mechanism designed to strengthen humanitarian responses by "clarifying the division of labor among organizations, and better defining their roles and responsibilities within the different sectors of the response. It is about making the international humanitarian community more structured, accountable and professional, so that it can be a better partner for host governments, local authorities and local civil society."¹⁰¹ While the coordination of the humanitarian response in CAR has improved since the cluster approach was adopted there in July 2007, significant gaps remain and urgent needs are unmet.

Ten clusters have been activated in CAR since 2007. They are grouped under the Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team, a platform that was created to increase visibility and funding for CAR. Led by UNHCR, the protection cluster holds monthly meetings in Bangui. Government representatives are invited periodically to develop protection strategies jointly. The protection cluster has also been activated at the field level, with cluster meetings held in Paoua, Bozoum, Bocaranga, and Kaga Bandoro.

While the recent reactivation of the child protection sub-cluster by UNICEF and UNHCR is a welcome development, both agencies should work diligently to ensure that the sub-cluster's action plans are fully funded and implemented. Without funding, the child protection sub-cluster will be unable to mainstream child protection issues into all clusters activated in CAR, or respond to unmet protection and assistance needs of children affected by armed conflict.

In an effort to strengthen gender-responsive programming among clusters, UNICEF and UNFPA activated the GBV sub-cluster in CAR in January 2011 to focus mainly on prevention and response to GBV. In February 2011, the GBV sub-cluster met in Bangui with all relevant partners and adopted a common mechanism for data collection. Efforts should be made by the GBV and child protection sub-clusters to develop complementary systems of data collection to help monitor and report on the six grave violations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882. To achieve this, a member of the MRM Task Force should sit in both sub-clusters as an MRM focal point.

Finally, a potential action the protection cluster could take that could have an impact on the protection of children affected by armed conflict is to hold discussions with armed groups about access to justice concerns, especially in areas near Paoua and Bocaranga where the APRD is the de-facto authority and, as such, has used a parallel system of justice to impart sentences that are not in line with international human rights law and CAR statutory law. For example, NGOs have reported cases in which women have been accused by their communities of adultery or witchcraft, and the sentences imparted by APRD have included violence against the accused, even executions, leaving children orphaned as a result. The lack of access to justice in conflict areas is therefore especially important

for the protection of children living there. The protection cluster could also hold discussions with UPDF regarding the re-traumatization of victims of the LRA in Obo who are being forced to interact on a daily basis with ex-LRA combatants who were their former commanders and/or perpetrators of violence.

recommendations

(the protection cluster)

MRM Task Force in CAR

- Establish a secure information-sharing system with the protection and education clusters, and the GBV and child protection sub-clusters, both in Bangui and at the field level, to ensure that any issues related to UN Security Council Resolutions 1612 and 1882 collected or shared with the clusters is also shared with the MRM Task Force.

UNICEF

- Work with the protection cluster to ensure that the action plans of the newly reactivated child protection sub-cluster are fully funded and implemented, that the child protection sub-cluster can access CAP appeals for funding for the MRM, and that child protection concerns are mainstreamed into all clusters activated in CAR.

Protection Cluster in CAR

- Hold talks with the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) in Obo to address the issue of the re-traumatization of victims of the LRA in Obo. Children abducted by the LRA who are no longer in captivity are being forced to interact on a daily basis in Obo with ex-LRA combatants. Talks should consider quick impact solutions such as preventing ex-LRA combatants from leaving the UPDF military base in Obo except as part of tracking teams sent into the forest to pursue the LRA, and ensuring that they have minimal contact with the local population. Talks should also consider longer-term issues of impunity and accountability on an individual basis.

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International Treaties Signed (S)/ Ratified (R)/ Acceded (A)/ Succession (D) (Year)	International Treaties Not Signed
<p>Convention on the Rights of the Child (R, 1992)</p> <p>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (S, 2010)</p> <p>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (S, 2010)</p> <p>The Geneva Conventions I, II, III and IV of 1949 (S, 1966)</p> <p>Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions, Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Conflicts (A, 1984)</p> <p>Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions, relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (A, 1984).</p> <p>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A, 1991)</p> <p>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (A, 1981)</p> <p>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (A, 1981)</p> <p>Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (A, 2005)</p> <p>Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (D, 1962)</p> <p>Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction (A 2002)</p> <p>Convention on Cluster Munitions (S, 2008)</p> <p>Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (R, 2001)</p> <p>International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor (R, 2000)</p> <p>Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A, 2006)</p>	<p>Protocol III of the Geneva Conventions, relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem</p> <p>Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment</p> <p>Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide</p> <p>Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment</p>





International Treaties Signed (S)/ Ratified (R)/ Acceded (A)/ Succession (D) (Year)	International Treaties Not Signed
<p>ILO Convention 29 on Forced Labor (R, 1960)</p> <p>ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Right to Organize (R, 1960)</p> <p>Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A, 2006)</p>	
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