

Confidential

**Update Note for the Secretary-General
Friday, 7 March 2014**



1. Central African Republic

“Shocking and never-ending” is how HRW describes the human rights situation in western CAR after a visit. Extreme violence continues in the capital. Anti-Balaka were seen parading with limbs of a Muslim they had killed in front of Sangaris in one of the neighbourhoods. 5 more Muslims were shot dead last Saturday.

Outside Bangui, several towns are now empty of their Muslim communities. In Boda, a town divided between Muslim and non-Muslim areas, HRW found thousands of Muslims starving because of Anti-Balaka refusal to allow them to purchase, or merchants to sell them, food. Anti-Balaka has told OHCHR that unless they leave shortly, before the rainy season, they would attack the remaining Muslims. In Bohong, only 120 Muslims remain. In a blatant expression of impunity, Anti-Balaka chiefs easily admitted to HRW of having killed civilians a few days ago. *All witnesses point to the urgency of implementing the SG's six-point plan, in particular deployment of troops and police and to ensure a much stronger protection-oriented coordination among MISCA, Sangaris and BINUCA.*

SRSB Gaye warns that the de facto partition of the country along religious lines is a reality following the major population shifts that have occurred since 5 December. He notes that the authorities in Bangui do not control the eastern part of CAR and there are no visible signs of State authority in this vast area, which is largely controlled by ex-Séléka and coincides with the territory claimed by the "l'Etat Autonome du Nord-Oubangui" in a document recently circulated in Bangui. According to Gaye, it is estimated that up to 200,000 Muslims have left the capital with less than 20% of the original Muslim population still left in the city, most of whom are gathered in specific sites and under threat from anti-Balaka. The rest of the Muslim population from the west of the country has also fled to safety in the north. Abandoned houses are being burned to ensure that their rightful owners do not return. Meanwhile, anti-Balaka, who continue to commit atrocities on a daily basis, continue to enjoy tacit support from large sections of the Christian population and of some elites. Gaye warns that if the physical separation of Muslims and Christians is not quickly addressed it could have reverberations throughout the entire region. Recent statements from Boko Haram, AQIM and the Taliban seeking revenge for the killing of Muslims are a clear indicator of this wider danger.

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2. Ukraine - Crimea

While the world has focused on Moscow's claim that it has the right to defend the well-being of its "citizens and numerous compatriots," and the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine – most specifically in Crimea; and Kiev's counter arguments revolving around territorial integrity, little if any attention is given to the peninsula's oldest community – the Tatars (a Sunni Muslim Turkic group that make up approximately 13% of the local population). The Tatars are traditionally pro-Ukrainian, and much better organized than the local Ukrainians, who make up 23% of Crimea's population.

The Tatars have been in Crimea since at least the late 14th century. They came to the area as part of Genghis Khan's army and stayed on after the Mongol Empire split up. Crimea later became part of the Ottoman Empire and in 1783, Catherine the Great annexed it to Russia. Crimea remained part of Russia for almost two centuries. In 1944, Stalin accused the entire population of Crimean Tatars of collaborating with the Nazis and deported them to Siberia en masse. In the early 1990s, most of the Tatars, whom Stalin exiled, came flocking back to their homeland, and since 1989, the Tatar population in the peninsula has multiplied about seven fold to about 270,000 today.

This group is now caught in a delicate position between Moscow and Kiev and may become a key local player in the current tug of war. Most historians and regional experts agree that whatever the Tatar grievances against the Ukrainian state may be, when faced with the choice of being under either Russian or Ukrainian control, the Crimean Tatar leadership has consistently and unequivocally chosen Ukraine. However, over the past weeks, Russia has reached out to the Tatars offering to give them "the status of Crimean Tatar national autonomy" in return for acceding to Russian control. International and local media reports that the Tatar community is forming self-defence units. The Crimean Tatars have been well organized since the 1960s and most of their religious and cultural organizations have close links to official Islam in Turkey. Now the Crimean Tatars fear these organizations may very well be suppressed in a Russian-controlled Crimea.

The current events in Crimea are taking place immediately prior to the 70th anniversary this May of the 1944 deportation of Tatars by the USSR. Russia's current stance on the Crimea, without any opportunity for a Tatar voice, may easily become a flash point. Russia's relationship with Turkey is already under threat and its reputation in the Middle East may also be (further) damaged. Russia also has millions of Muslims of its own, the vast majority of whom are Sunni, including next door in the North Caucasus. Historically, the Crimean

Tatars had close ties with the Circassians, who were driven from the Sochi area in 1864. It should not be forgotten that one reason why Putin has invested so much in backing Assad's Alawite regime in Syria against the Sunni majority was his fear that a hardline Sunni regime in Damascus would foment a Sunni unrest at home.

3. Syria

DPA reports that the upcoming General Assembly of the Syria Opposition Coalition (SOC), originally scheduled for today and tomorrow but delayed while SOC leaders decide on a venue, is expected to address the endorsement of the transition plan that the opposition delegation put forward during Geneva II and decision on who will represent the SOC at the LAS. On Geneva II, the SOC political decision to engage constructively still stands. They are willing and ready to resume talks, and defer to JSR Brahimi to set the date.

With Saudi backing, efforts to consolidate the allied northern and southern armed opposition groups are well under way; diplomatic sources have indicated that a new tranche of Saudi military supplies has arrived into southern Syria, and that the US is covertly providing training and support to Syrian rebels in Jordan. Media reported that President Jarba was in Jordan on a "secret visit" on 27 February, meeting with senior US and Jordanian officials. Amman continues to deny any role in arming the opposition. The report of the Panel of Experts on Libya is scheduled to be released on 13 March, which is expected to address weapons transfers from Libya to Syria through neighbouring member states. This report will likely not confirm the role of particular member states in arming the Syrian opposition, but could reference ongoing investigations involving Qatar, Turkey and Jordan.

4. Gaza

UNSCO reports on information provided by UNRWA on the situation in Gaza. On the socio-economic front, there is real possibility that the power plant in Gaza risked being closed next week. There is a general sense of desperation and frustration, in part manifested in animosity towards UNRWA. But the issues are much larger than an anti-UN sentiment. The main cause of discontent is unemployment; a general sense of desperation by tunnel and construction workers who have gone out of business (in the face of tunnel closures effected by the Egyptians). The very real concern of not being paid has resulted in those workers overcoming their fear of the Hamas regime and taking to the streets.

In brief, Hamas/Gaza are "holding their breath" until the Israeli-Palestinian framework discussions come to a landing, not because of the expectation that the peace process would have any real effect on Gaza, but rather because the regime had placed "all the eggs on the reconciliation basket". They were thus waiting for Abbas' next move, once he has made up his mind on the framework. There seemed to be a bit more optimism on the reconciliation file on the assumption that Abbas would have to reach out either because he would require a unity government to sell the deal or for his credibility if he rejects it. But a very palpable fear is that there is no plan B; Hamas has nowhere to go short of conflict; the Egypt door was firmly closed; and there was no one "coming to rescue".

In terms of security implications, UNSCO observes that no significant increased risk was envisaged. But there was apprehension about all short- to mid-term scenarios: ranging from civil unrest and chaos, a situation mirroring the prolonged period of anarchy in 2006 with multiple armed groups floating around with varied degree of control; a potential breakdown within Hamas (political wing and Qassam); or others pulling out of the ceasefire; general insecurity with potential of targeting of internationals (not necessarily UN) and increased risk of conflict within Gaza or with Israel. It was agreed that without over-dramatizing the situation a concerted thought should be given as to how to broach relevant parties, putting Gaza on the radar screen.



Political, Peacekeeping, Humanitarian
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cc: DSG, CDC