

For Immediate Release

Central African Republic: Progress on Special Criminal Court

More Efforts Needed to Get It Operating

(Bangui, December 23, 2015) – The Central African Republic transitional government, the United Nations, and donors should intensify their efforts to establish a Special Criminal Court, 23 Central African and international human rights groups said today.

In June 2015, the Central African Republic's transitional government promulgated a law passed in April to establish a Special Criminal Court inside the national judicial system, consisting of national and international staff, to investigate and prosecute the gravest crimes committed in the country since 2003, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“Our organizations welcome the steps taken by the transitional government to put an end to impunity for atrocities committed in the Central African Republic, notably through the establishment of a Special Criminal Court,” the groups said. “These efforts must continue and be supported by international actors to ensure that the court envisioned on paper becomes a reality as quickly as possible.”

Despite a difficult security situation, the Central African authorities have taken some first steps to establish the court. The government has, among other measures, selected and made available a building to enable the first investigative and prosecutorial activities of the court. It has prepared some of the decrees required for the court to function, and developed job descriptions for recruiting the court's future staff. The UN has continued to support this process, notably by sending a team of experts to assess the logistical and financial needs of the court, and by preparing a project plan to support the establishment of the court.

Grave human rights [violations](#) are still being committed in the Central African Republic. Non-governmental organizations recently documented [more than 100 killings](#), as well as the destruction of vital infrastructure and [20 cases of sexual assault](#) in the course of [sectarian violence](#) that has shaken Bangui since the end of September. These figures most likely represent only a fraction of the grave crimes that have been committed with total impunity in the Central African Republic.

The Central African justice system is still too weak to investigate and prosecute such crimes. This is why the Special Criminal Court has a leading role to play in the fight against impunity in the Central African Republic, the groups said.

Presidential and parliamentary elections in the Central African Republic are slated for December 27, 2015, with a possible second round planned January 31, 2016, if no candidate receives a majority of the votes. Many local human rights organizations fear a new wave of violence around the elections.

“It is urgent that the Special Criminal Court be up and running to try these crimes and to clearly signal that abuses of this kind will no longer be tolerated,” the groups said.

The effective operationalization of the court will only be possible if the Central African authorities have the means and opportunity to assume full ownership over it and take increased leadership in establishing it.

In this regard, an existing steering committee could play a key role in developing a common vision of the Special Criminal Court and guiding all measures required to get the court up and running, including, but not limited to, the recruitment of personnel. The steering committee includes the transitional government, the UN, and some international partners. It should meet regularly, the groups said.

The court's provisional budget should be quickly finalized so the search for funding can begin, the groups said. For the court to succeed it will also be essential to recruit international experts with proven experience prosecuting grave international crimes, who are willing to work closely with their national counterparts. Donors should begin to mobilize the funds and technical support essential for the court's effective operation.

The fight against impunity for grave crimes committed in the Central African Republic, as well as cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC), must stay firmly on the agenda of the future government and of international partners who support peace and the rule of law in the country, the groups said. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is also conducting investigations in the Central African Republic but will most likely only prosecute a few suspects. The ICC is complementary to the national judicial system and the Special Criminal Court.

“It is clear that justice for the grave crimes committed in the Central African Republic is an essential building block for durable peace in the nation,” the groups said. “Financial and logistical support for the Special Criminal Court is both an indispensable investment in the future and a moral duty toward victims who have suffered so much.”

Signatory Organizations:

Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture et la Peine de Mort (ACAT-RCA)

Amnesty International

Association des Femmes Juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC)

Associations des Victimes de la LRA en Centrafrique (AVLRAC)

Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF)

Bureau Information des Droits de l'Homme (BIDH)

Coalition centrafricaine pour la Cour Pénale Internationale (CCCPI)

Civisme et Démocratie (CIDEM)

Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix (CEJP)

Enfants Sans Frontières (ESF)

Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme (FIDH)

Femme Action et Développement en Centrafrique (FADEC)

Human Rights Watch

Initiative pour le Développement de Centrafrique (IDC)

Lead Centrafrique (Lead)

Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (LCDH)

Mouvement des Droits de l'Homme et Action Humanitaire (MDDH)
Observatoire Centrafricain des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH)
Observatoire Centrafricain pour les Elections et La Démocratie (OCED)
Observatoire pour la Promotion de l'Etat de Droit (OPED)
Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
Réseau des ONGs Centrafricaines pour la Défense et la Promotion des Droits de l'Homme (RONGDH)
Réseau national de la Jeunesse pour les Droits de l'Homme (RNJDH)

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