

# French soldiers sexually abused children in Central African Republic

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On April 29, Britain's *Guardian* newspaper revealed the sexual abuse of children aged between 8 and 15 by French soldiers in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR). The deeply impoverished country has experienced escalating sectarian fighting between Christian Anti-balaka and Muslim Seleka militias. Thousands of civilians had fled Bangui neighborhoods to seek shelter in nearby M'Poko airport.

According to the *Guardian*, the alleged abuse took place between December 2013 and June 2014 in a refugee camp in Bangui.

Reuters cited French judicial sources saying that a number of French soldiers had been identified. Chadian peacekeepers were also allegedly involved in the sexual abuse. On Thursday, *Le Monde* reported that more than 14 soldiers are under investigation.

The *Guardian* revelation was based on a leaked report by a senior UN aid worker, Anders Kompass, who disclosed the abuse allegation to French prosecutors last July, after the UN failed to take action to stop the abuse. Kompass is under investigation for breaching confidential information and was suspended after leaking the report.

According to many witnesses, young boys accused French soldiers of having raped and abused them "in exchange for food" or money. The incidents took place before and after the establishment of the UN-led peacekeeping mission in CAR.

The leaked report contains interviews with six children, who were sexually abused by French soldiers. Some indicated that several of their friends were also sexually assaulted. According to the *Guardian*, "The interviews were carried out by an official from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights justice section and a member of Unicef between May

and June last year."

One interview describes how two nine-year-old children were sexually assaulted together by two French soldiers who demanded oral sex in exchange for food.

The *Guardian* continues, "Another nine-year-old child describes how he went to ask for food from the French military at the IDP camp at M'Poko airport. He says the soldier told him to carry out a sex act on him first ... He [the child] had friends who had done it already, he knew what he had to do. Once done the military gave a military food portion and some food. X said the military had forbidden him to tell anything about him to anybody, and that if he would do so he would beat him."

The sexual abuse committed by French soldiers exposes the utterly fraudulent character of the "humanitarian" pretensions of French imperialism's intervention in CAR, a former French colony.

Paris launched its military intervention in CAR in December 2013 under the guise of halting sectarian violence between majority Christian and minority Muslims. Paris initially backed Muslim Seleka forces in an attempt to topple President François Bozizé, aiming to seize the strategically located country in the centre of the African continent, and destroying China's growing economic influence in the country. China had made several key deals with the CAR under Bozizé, including on oil contracts and military cooperation.

Paris initially deployed 1,600 troops in the CAR and around 2,000 troops are being deployed under the peacekeeping mission, codenamed Operation Sangaris. Since Paris intervened militarily, the humanitarian crisis has deepened and sectarian conflict has escalated.

Although the report on the sexual abuse emerged last July, the PS government kept total silence on the matter

and avoided taking any legal action. Since the *Guardian* 's revelation, the government has made hypocritical comments, and is seeking to whitewash the case.

When informed on the affair last July, in an interview to *Le Journal du Dimanche* on May 3, French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian claimed to have felt “disgust and a form of betrayal of the mission that was given to Operation Sangaris,” adding: “I immediately transmitted the report to the judiciary. It was our wish that the full truth rapidly come to light in this affair.”

After the report was passed to the French prosecutor, an internal army investigation into the matter reportedly was carried out, ending in August.

Le Drian claimed that the investigation has been “made available to the justice system.” With the case still in its preliminary stages after it was opened nine months ago, Le Drian downplayed it, saying, “I believe it is a complex inquiry. Since the crimes allegedly took place, most of the soldiers involved have left this theater of operations, but this should not prevent the judiciary from rapidly doing its work.”

In a cynical attempt to give a positive, “humanitarian” face to more imperialist crimes, President François Hollande said, “If some soldiers have behaved badly, I will show no mercy ... You know the trust I have in our army, [and] the role the French military play in the world.”



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