

Spreading violence in Central African Republic sets off 'loud alarm bells' – UN human rights chief

16 May 2017 – The United Nations human rights chief today expressed grave alarm over the spread of violence by armed groups against the civilian population in several parts of the Central African Republic in recent months, as well as attacks against UN peacekeepers in the country's southeast.

“Violence and rising tensions are spreading to areas of the Central African Republic that had previously been spared the kinds of terrifying violence seen in some other parts of the country – this is highly worrying and should set off loud alarm bells,” said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein in a news release from his Office (OHCHR).

“The hard-earned relative calm in Bangui and some of the bigger towns in CAR risks being eclipsed by the descent of some rural areas into increasing sectarian violence, with defenceless civilians – as usual – paying the highest price,” he added.

The latest in a series of attacks was an incident this weekend in Bangassou, in which armed men used heavy weapons to attack the base of the UN mission in CAR, known by its French acronym MINUSCA. The armed men also attacked the Muslim neighbourhood of Tokoyo where numerous civilians were killed and others wounded.

Investigations by MINUSCA's Human Rights Division suggest that between March and May 2017 more than 121 civilians and six peacekeepers were killed, excluding figures in the two latest incidents.

Mr. Zeid also noted the fact that the Special Criminal Court is preparing to start its work is a strong signal by the authorities and the international community that the continued climate of impunity is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, the Security Council issued a statement to the press overnight, strongly condemning the violence by anti-Balaka elements in Bangassou on 13 and 14 May 2017 that targeted MINUSCA's field office, civilian populations from particular communities, as well as humanitarian personnel.

The 15-member body reiterated that “attacks against peacekeepers may constitute war crimes and reminded all parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law.”

The Council called on the Government to swiftly investigate this attack and bring the perpetrators to justice.