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**Central African Republic: After a year in office, justice must remain a priority for President Touadéra**

Justice and the fight against impunity for crimes under international law must continue to be a central priority for President Faustin Archange Touadéra's government, said Amnesty International and 30 human rights organizations working in the Central African Republic in a declaration issued today.

A year to the day since President Touadéra took office, the organizations issued a reminder of the undertakings he has made: to see that justice is done for victims and to ensure that the perpetrators of the huge numbers of human rights violations and crimes under international law committed in the country in recent years are held to account. In his inauguration address on 30 March 2016, for instance, he declared that there could be "no reconciliation without justice" and that "justice would be done".

Though the security situation remains fragile, significant advances have been observed during the first year of his presidency. The progress made in operationalizing the Special Criminal Court (SCC), particularly the appointment of a Special Prosecutor in February 2017 and the two criminal trial sessions held in June 2015 and August-September 2016, are testament to the CAR authorities' political will to restore justice.

President Touadéra also recently reiterated, in front of the United Nations Security Council on 16 March 2017, that any peace initiative in the Central African Republic would have to take account of the imperatives for justice set out by the people in the conclusions and recommendations of the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation held in May 2015. Among other things, he mentioned the principle of "zero impunity", particularly the refusal to grant immunity or amnesty to those allegedly responsible for crimes under international law.

However, if justice is to be done for the thousands of victims, many challenges still remain. Re-establishing the rule of law is a prerequisite. Protection for civilians, demobilization, disarmament of armed groups, strengthening of the national judicial system and promotion of an economic and social recovery are all areas in which the president and his government need to act and intervene.

The signatory organizations also stressed the urgent need to rebuild the Central African Republic's judicial system and to address its many shortcomings, particularly the lack of functioning judicial institutions throughout the country, the shortage of qualified legal personnel, the lack of financial and material resources for justice, the lack of victim and witness protection measures, and the weakness of the prison system.

Given the challenges the national system has to overcome, it is crucial, while it gets back on its feet, to strengthen the SCC, an essential strategic tool for ensuring that perpetrators of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations are brought to justice.

The signatory organizations highlight the importance of donors honouring the pledges they made at the international donors' conference in Brussels in November 2016 and, in particular, supplying the entirety of the \$105 million budget earmarked for strengthening the country's judicial apparatus and operationalizing the SCC under the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan.

**Operationalizing the Special Criminal Court**

The appointment of Toussaint Muntazini Mukimapa of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as Special Prosecutor of the SCC on 15 February 2017 was a key moment in the process of making this hybrid court operational. In addition, the advances made in the recruitment procedure for the Deputy Special Prosecutor and the other members of the SCC, the recruitment of national and international judges, the creation of a selection committee for judicial police officers, the holding of awareness-raising sessions aimed at civil society, and the planned drafting of the rules of procedure and evidence all constitute important steps towards establishing a properly functioning court.

The signatory organizations encouraged the CAR government to continue and accelerate the progress made in recruiting national and international judges and other members of SCC staff, and to ensure that this process is independent, transparent and merit-based.

They also concluded that the Central African Republic's international partners must provide sustainable funding to guarantee the proper operation of the SCC, as well as nominating judges and qualified legal personnel for current and future vacancies and offering political support for the institution.

### **Cooperation with the International Criminal Court**

The signatory organizations reiterated that in order to effectively combat impunity for serious crimes committed in the Central African Republic, the national authorities would also have to cooperate fully and unreservedly with the International Criminal Court (ICC), which acts as a complement to the SCC in the national judicial system. The CAR government referred its country's situation to the ICC in 2014.

### **Signatory organizations**

- Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture et la Peine de Mort (ACAT-RCA)
- Amnesty International (AI)
- Association des Femmes Juristes de Centrafrique (AFJC)
- Association des Femmes Musulmanes Actives pour le Développement (AFMAD)
- Association des Victimes de la LRA en Centrafrique (AVLRAC)
- Association des Victimes des Évènements du 29 Octobre 2015 et Suivants
- Association pour la Défense, le Rétablissement et le Développement des Droits Humains (ADRDH)
- Avocats Sans Frontières RCA (ASF/RCA)
- Bureau d'Information sur les Droits de l'Homme (BIDH)
- CAR National Coalition for the ICC (CICC-CAR)
- Centre pour l'Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable (CIEDD)
- Civisme et Démocratie (CIDEM)
- Comité National pour la Prévention du Crime de Génocide (CNPCG)
- Commission Episcopale Justice et Paix (CEJP)
- Coordination des Organisations Musulmanes de Centrafrique (COMUC)
- Enfants Sans Frontières (ESF)
- Femmes Action et Développement en Centrafrique (FADEC)
- Femmes, Hommes, Action Plus (FHAP)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Leadership en Centrafrique (Lead Centrafrique)
- Ligue Centrafricaine des Droits de l'Homme (LCDH)

- Mouvement de Droits de l'Homme et l'Action Humanitaire (MDDH)
- Observatoire Centrafricain des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH)
- Observatoire pour les Elections et l'Etat de Droit (OPED)
- Organisation des Femmes Musulmanes de Centrafrique (OFMCA)
- Planète Femmes Centrafrique (PFC)
- Plateforme de la Société Civile en République Centrafricaine (SCRCA)
- Réseau Centrafricain des Organisations pour la Promotion et la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RONGDH)
- Réseau National des Organisations de Jeunes pour les Droits de l'Homme (RNOJDH)
- VITALITE PLUS
- Women Act for Living Together (WALT)