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***To view report: <http://watchlist.org/the-countries/central-african-republic/>

***Link to live press conference September 10, 2015, 10:30am EST: <http://www.un.org/webcast/>

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS ENDANGERING STUDENTS Schools occupied and looted, students and teachers threatened

New York, September 10, 2015—Armed groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) have attacked schools, students, and teachers and, along with international peacekeeping forces, have used schools as bases for their activities, said [Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict](#) (Watchlist) in a report released today. The Transitional Government of CAR and the international community should take urgent steps to secure the school environment and promote children’s right to education.

Watchlist’s 58-page report, *Vulnerable Students, Unsafe Schools: Attacks and Military Use of Schools in the Central African Republic*, details pervasive, ongoing incidents of ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka armed groups looting schools, threatening students and teachers, attacking areas without distinguishing schools, and instilling fear in local communities of further attacks. It is based on interviews with 178 people, including 22 students (aged 18 and below) and 57 school staff. A recent [Education Cluster assessment](#) found that 38 percent of the schools surveyed have been attacked or used for military purposes.

“Many students and teachers have returned to school for the 2014-2015 academic year, but remain vulnerable to attack,” said Janine Morna, Research Officer at Watchlist. “Ensuring children’s right to education is fundamental to CAR’s transition to peace.”

The report also documents armed groups and international peacekeeping forces using schools as lodging or for other military-related purposes, often causing significant damage to facilities, delaying the reopening of schools, and exposing students and teachers to risk of attack. Watchlist documented some cases of African Union-led Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous Conduite Africaine (MISCA), French Opération Sangaris, and United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) forces establishing temporary bases in school facilities, but in recent months communities have reported fewer of these incidents. This is in part because of MINUSCA’s efforts to implement a United Nations [policy](#) prohibiting the military use of schools by its peacekeeping troops.

“Armed groups, the African Union, and the French government should similarly adopt and implement stronger [policies](#) that prohibit, or at least minimize, the military use of schools to protect children’s right to education,” said Morna.

The Transitional Government of CAR took a first important step towards protecting schools by signing the [Safe Schools Declaration](#), through which it expressed its support for protecting education during armed conflict, and endorsed and committed to implementing the [Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict](#) (Guidelines).

“To ensure students can learn in a safe environment, the Transitional Government of CAR should implement the Guidelines and criminalize attacks on schools. The international community can support these efforts by improving school security, monitoring violations, and raising awareness on attacks and military use of schools,” said Morna.

Select Accounts from the Report

A teacher told Watchlist, “One commander promised to kill me in the presence of my students. He quickly removed his knife and showed it to me. ... The children were scared.”

A teacher describes a case of members of the anti-Balaka looting the food from the school’s feeding program: “The anti-Balaka told us, ‘We are coming in the night to take the food.’ ... That same day they came around 11pm, shooting in the air before they came in. ... They took all the food and left us only [a few] bags of rice.The feeding program [ended].”

A student described to Watchlist the challenges of walking to school every day, “When we are going back [home] the Séléka threaten us ... There is a neighborhood called Arab You have to pass by this area to come to school. It makes us scared. ... What we do now is we deviate from the area.”

A member of a school staff described ongoing insecurity in schools to Watchlist: “We work in an atmosphere of worry all the time. This is why students don’t return [to school]. We are not totally secure here [at school], anything can happen.”

A student whose school was used as a base by international peacekeeping forces told Watchlist, “Everything [at the school] has been destroyed by international forces and should be replaced.”

Watchlist’s report will go live on Watchlist’s Central African Republic page on September 10, 2015, at 10:30am: <http://watchlist.org/the-countries/central-african-republic/>

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Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, established in 2001, is an international network of human rights and humanitarian nongovernment organizations striving to end violations against children in armed conflict and to guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflict to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children. Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a project of Tides Center, a non-profit public charity.

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